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The Buddha as Myth

Universal themes in the Buddha's life

An introduction by Piya Tan ©2007

1 Sources of the Buddha's life

1.1 THE HISTORICAL BUDDHA. The life of the Buddha that we often read or hear about is presented in two important ways, that is, as history and as legend.¹ The historical sources of the Buddha life, or the depiction of the Buddha as a historical person, are (in Buddhist literature), strictly speaking, only found in the early suttas. The earliest historical account that we have of the Buddha, especially his renunciation and awakening, is found in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26).²

Jonathan S Walters, in his journal article, "Suttas as History: Four approaches to the *Sermon on the Noble Quest* (Ariyapariyesanasutta)" (*History of Religions*, 1993) concludes that the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta is "arguably the oldest Buddha biography in existence" (1993:283). The Sutta, Walters notes,

is full of startling silences: here we have no Suddhodana, no Mahā,māyā, no Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, no Yasodharā and Rāhula, no pleasure palace, no women of the harem, no four signs, no Channa, no renunciatory fanfare, no practice of austerities, no Sujātā's milk-rice, no Māra's army at the Bodhi tree, no three watches of the night, no seven weeks after the Great Awakening, no text of the First Sermon (replaced by the heap of snares, frame IV!). (1993:276)

Later biographies of the Buddha, he adds, "are direct and indirect supplementations" of this Sutta (277).³

The Pali Canon as a whole does not have any complete biography of the Buddha. However, whatever accounts of the Buddha that we have in **the Suttas**, especially those which are free of any miraculous or superhuman embellishments, contribute to a valuable pastiche of our historical Buddha. However, this is not to say that the Buddha is incapable of superhuman feats or that miracles do not occur on his account: we can only say that we now have no way of knowing this, and that this ignorance or lack of information has no bearing at all on the Buddha's awakening or spirituality.

The Vinaya, especially the Mahā Khandhaka of the Mahā Vagga, has some biographical information on the Buddha, relating to the events of the awakening up to the going forth of Sāriputta and Moggallāna.⁴ It includes an account of the first discourse.⁵ However, as in the case of the Sutta Vibhaṅga (the analyses of the monastic rules), such biographical accounts are not chronological, as they serve only as the case-histories behind the promulgation of the rules.⁶

Some scholars have attempted to put together materials for a *historical*, or at least *canonical*, life of the Buddha. Two well known efforts are those of the British Theravada monk, Ñāṇamoli, in his book, *The Life of the Buddha* (1972), and the Japanese Buddhist scholar, Hajime Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha*, in two volumes (2000, 2005), translated from the Japanese by Gaynor Sekimori.

Ñāṇamoli, in his book's Introduction, says that the work includes "all the canonical material (except the Buddhavaṃsa)" covering the Buddha's birth down to the second year of the ministry, and the last year. However, it includes relevant materials from the Commentaries, and excerpts from the late Burmese work, *Mālālaṅkāra,vatthu* (15th century?), translated by the Catholic missionary, Bishop Paul Bigandet (1866) (1972:xiii).

¹ E J Thomas, eg, titled his classic work, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History* (1949).

² M 26/1:160-175 @ SD 1.11. See K R Norman 1990:126 f, qu L Schmithausen 1981:207, qu A Barea. Also Nakamura 2000: 247 f.

³ See further **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26) + SD 1.11(1).

⁴ V 1:39-43.

⁵ V 1:10-12; S 56.11/5:420-424 @ SD 1.1.

⁶ Not all the rules were promulgated by the Buddha himself. It is possible that some of them were introduced by the elders, perhaps posthumously. Much of the Vinaya materials are late, anyway, ie, post-Buddha. See V:H 4:xxiii f; also Norman 1983b:18-29; Hinüber 1996 II.1.

The full title of **Nakamura's** two-volume work is *Gotama Buddha: A biography based on the most reliable texts*. As clear from its Preface, Nakamura, in these magnificent volumes, tries to present the Buddha biography “as close as possible to the actual life of Sakyamuni as a historical figure” (2000:11), Nakamura’s zeal is commendable, as his work is a careful biographical study of the Buddha which includes relevant materials from non-Buddhist Indian texts, the Chinese translations (the Āgamas), as well as scholarly secondary sources. His classic work was published in the wake of a radical movement in Japanese Buddhism, known as Critical Buddhism, whose exponents attempt to look at Buddhism in a critical and rational way, and rejecting “what the Buddha did not teach.”⁷

1.2 THE LEGENDARY BUDDHA. Even in the Suttas, we find the Buddha is sometimes, especially in the later texts, described in miraculous terms, such as in **the Mahā’padāna Sutta** (D 14)⁸ and **the Acchariyābhūta Sutta** (M 123). The latter lists 20 miracles attending his birth (related by Ānanda), such as an earth-tremor, two streams of water, one warm, one cool, issuing forth from the sky to wash him and his mother, and an intense light brightening everything up.⁹

The longest and oldest account of the Buddha’s life that we have is the commentarial **Nidāna,kathā** (the Talk on the Beginnings), the long introduction to the **Jātak’atthakathā** (the Jātaka Commentary).¹⁰ It is one of the most important sources of the legendary life of the Buddha, the **Nidāna,kathā**, and is in three sections, as follows:

- (1) *dūre,nidāna* — “the beginning in the remote past,” which recounts the Bodhisattva from his existence as Sumedha during the time of the Buddha Dīpaṅkara down to his rebirth in Tusita heaven (J 1:2-47);
- (2) *avidūre,nidāna* — “the beginning in the not very distant past,” starting with the descent from Tusita, and ending in the Great Awakening (J 1:47-77);
- (3) *santike,nidāna* — “the beginning in the present,” from the awakening down to the donation of the Jeta,vana by the seth Anātha,piṇḍika (J 1:77-94).

The first section is, in fact, a commentary on verses, most of which are directly taken from **the Buddha,vaṃsa**¹¹ and **the Cariyā,piṭaka**,¹² the last two books of the Khuddaka Nikāya. The story of Sumedha comes from the **Buddha,vaṃsa** (cf B 2.1-188), and the striving for perfection in each birth is described in the **Cariyā,piṭaka** [2.2], which however seems to have come from a recension different from the one we now have.¹³

The miracles described here are found in the Suttas, but attributed to other buddhas. The miracles at a buddha’s birth (not Gotama’s), for example, is recorded in **the Mahā’padāna Sutta** (D 14) as those

⁷ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_Buddhism and the links therein.

⁸ D 14 @ SD 49.8.

⁹ M 123/3:118-124 @ SD 52.2. The Chinese Āgama version of M 123 (T1.469c-47c), which is slightly longer than the Pali version, adds another 10 miracles, different from those of the Pali.

¹⁰ Tr N A Jayawickrama, **Story of Gotama Buddha**, London: Pali Text Soc, 1990. See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 261/1:160-175), SD 1.11(1) & Hinüber 1996: §316.

¹¹ **Buddha,vaṃsa** (B) is a late work, compiled at a time, definitely by Asoka’s time, when the the number of past buddhas had reached 24. The **Buddha,vaṃsa** is related by the Buddha, it is said, in response to Sāriputta’s question about the Bodhisattva’s resolve and aspiration for Buddhahood. In reply, the Buddha relates the lives of these buddhas, and what he, as bodhisattva, did under each Buddha. The ancient reciters who compiled B used the life of Gotama (B ch 26) as the model for those of the past buddhas, changing only the details. The effect of this text is to show that our Gotama is not unique as the Buddha, and also that there would be other buddhas after him. See K R Norman 1983b:92-94.

¹² **Cariyā,piṭaka** (C) is the 15th and last book of the Khuddaka Nikāya (Kh), comprising 35 Jātaka-type stories arranged in three books or chapters (*vagga*), illustrating the 10 perfections (*pāramī*). Its colophon (end-remark) calls itself **Buddhāpadāna** (C 37,1 f), “which again shows the unusual use of the word *apadāna* instead of Jātaka in connection with the Buddha” (Norman 1983b:93, also 36).

¹³ See Norman 1983b:79 &n316.

attending the birth of the Buddha Vipassī,¹⁴ and in the **Acchariyābbhūta Sutta** (M 123) as occurring at the birth of all the buddhas.¹⁵ These miraculous stories (and other details) found in the Nidāna, kathā are the same as those found in Buddhist Sanskrit sources, which, concludes British philologist, K R Norman, “suggests that both the Pāli and the Sanskrit traditions are based upon a common body of biographical material, both legendary and historical, which was in existence in North India before the time of the schisms” (1983b:79).

1.3 THE MYTHICAL BUDDHA

1.3.1 In our study of the Buddha, it is useful for us, at first, to be able to distinguish between the historical facts, and the legendary stories, and later additions. The historical information we have of the Buddha gives us a good idea of his life as a human being, to which we can then easily relate to. In other words, the Buddha is a human like us, through his own efforts, attains awakening and liberation from suffering. Hence, we, too, are capable of such a liberating self-effort. This is a vital teaching found only in early Buddhism, while other religions, even later Buddhisms, as a rule, teach the need for salvation through an external agency, such as God.

To view the Buddha *merely* as a historical figure is to see him only intellectually, as through a non-Buddhist scholar’s eyes. It may mean that we are not aware of or even reject his spirituality. To view the Buddha as a miraculous or legendary figure is to *deify* him and so to distance him from our spiritual development, even from our daily life. To see the Buddha only as either a mere human or a rare superhuman is to limit our vision of the ideal of human awakening.

1.3.2 Ideally, we should strive to see him *as he really is*. To do this, it helps to remind ourselves that the Buddha and the arhat, as awakened beings, are beyond any conceptual categories—it is simply impossible to describe them in words or language in the conventional sense. In short, the texts mostly give us helpful concepts and instructions to work with our mind, preparing us for a fuller vision of the Buddha and the Dharma. The Buddha Dharma does not teach an affiliation but teaches us *liberation* [4.2.3]. That liberation comes from our mental training and spiritual awakening.

In a number of suttas, the Buddha explains that “when the Tathagata (the Buddha thus come) is not being apprehended ... as true and real¹⁶ here in this very life,”¹⁷ it is therefore not fitting even to describe him *apart* from this tetralemma¹⁸ of logical truth, that is to say that

(1) the Tathagata	exists	after death, or
(2) the Tathagata	does not exist	after death, or
(3) the Tathagata	both exists and not exist	after death, or
(4) the Tathagata	neither exists nor not exist	after death. ¹⁹

¹⁴ D 14,1.28-29/2:15 (SD 49.8). The Sutta also says that the new-born Bodhisattva takes seven steps and is able to speak.

¹⁵ M 123,19-20/3:123 (SD 52.3).

¹⁶ “As true and real,” *saccato thetato*; as at **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,25/1:138; cf 22.36/1:140); **Yamaka S** (S 22.-85,34/3:112); **Anurādha S** (S 22.86,21/3:118 = S 44.2.21/4:384); **Tiṭṭh’āyatana S** (A 3.61.2-4/1:174 f x3); **Vbh 376 f** (×4), **382** (×6); **Pug 3.17/38** (×12); **Kvu 67 f** (×13). **Vbh:T tr staccato thetato** as “firmly as truth” (Vbh:T 487).

¹⁷ **Be Ce Ke Se: diṭṭhe’va dhamme saccato tathato tathāgate anupalabbhiyamāne**; **Ee diṭṭhe’va dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabbhiyamāno**. Cf **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22): “And bhikkhus, since in truth and in reality, one can find neither self nor what belongs to a self” (*attani ca bhikkhave attaniye ca saccato thetato anupalabbhiyamāne*, M 22,25/1:138,5-6 @ SD 3.13) & “one thus gone, I say, is untraceable even here and now” (*diṭṭh’evāham bhikkhave dhamme tathāgataṃ ananuvejjo ti vadāmi*, M 22,36/1:140,6-7).

¹⁸ This is the Greek term for what is well known in Skt as *castuṣkoṭi* (the 4 points), which in canonical Pali is *catu,thāna* (the 4 grounds), found throughout the Canon: **D 1:27, 59, 188-191, 2:68, 3:135 f**; **M 1:157 f, 426-431, 484-486**; **S 2:222 f, 3:116 f, 119, 215-218, 258-260, 262 f, 4:286 f, 375-381, 384-402, 5:418, 448**; **A 2:41, 4:68 f, 5:31, 186 f, 193 f, 196-198**; **U 67**; **Nm 1:64, 184, 208, 290, 293, 300, 306, 319, 323, 326, 331**; **Pm 1:123, 151, 153-156, 158**; **Dhs 195, 198, 202, 208, 216**; **Vbh 340**; **Kvu 506, 624 f**; **Miln 145**.

¹⁹ In **Param,marāṇa S** (S 16.12/2:222 f) the Buddha mentions it to Mahā Kassapa; in **Anurādha S** (S 22.86/3:-116-119), **SD 21.13**. The tetralemma is mentioned by lemma in 4 suttas in **Samyutta** (S 24.15-18/3:215 f). The **Abyākata Samyutta** contains some suttas dealing with it (S 44.2-8/4:381-397): see S:B 1080 n165. For a philo-

The true nature of the Buddha (that is, buddhahood) is said to be “inaccessible to discursive thought” (*atakkâvacara*).²⁰ As such matters cannot be delved by way of our senses and language, they are said to be “beyond our range” (*avisaya*).²¹ However, we might just get some hints of them if language is tweaked in such a way as to point to their nature. This is *the language of myth*,²² and this is how we will examine the Buddha’s life in this essay.

2 Buddha: definition and typology

2.1 THE MEANING OF BUDDHA

2.1.1 The term *buddha* is not a proper name, but a generic term and appellative for one who has awakened to true reality and self-liberation. **The Mahā Niddesa** and **the Paṭisambhidā, magga** defines *buddha* as follows:

As regards “the Buddha”: in what sense is one a buddha?

He is the discoverer (*bujjhītā*) of truths, thus he is awakened (*buddha*).²³

He is the awakener (*bodhetā*) of the generation, thus he is awakened.²⁴

He is the Buddha on account of omniscience (*sabbaññūtā*).²⁵

He is the Buddha on account of seeing everything [all] (*sabba, dassavī*).²⁶

He is the Buddha on account of not being led by [of being independent of] others (*anañña, neyyatā*)...²⁷

“The Buddha”: this is not a name made up by a mother, by a father, by a brother, by a sister, by friends or companions, by relatives or blood relations, by recluses or brahmins, by deities.

It is a name on account of the final liberation of the awakened ones, the blessed ones, along with the attaining of omniscience at the foot of the Bodhi tree. This is a description of realization (*sacchikā paññatti*). (Nm 458; Pm §177/174)

2.1.2 The Buddha, in short, the most highly evolved amongst beings, human, non-human and divine, on account of his wisdom and conduct. In the case of *the Buddha*, he is the embodiment of the Dharma that he has awakened to. Although born *into* this world, through his own effort, he rises *above* the world. He is Buddha *sub specie aeternitatis*.²⁸

sophical discussion, see K N Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:350 & Kugler 2003:100 f. For a detailed analysis of the 10 points in terms of the tetralemma, see **Māluṅkya,putta S** (M 63) @ SD 5.8 Intro (2).

²⁰ It 37,20*; UA 391,32 (*nibbāṇānam*). Mostly preceded by *gambhīra santa paṇīta*, “profound, peaceful, subtle” (V 1:4,35, *dhmmo*, cf Mvst 3:314,2) = D 2:36,3 = 37,24 (*dhmmo*, glossed as “not to be farthomed or delved by thought, to be delved only through knowledge, *takkena avacaritabbo ogāhitabbo na hoti, ñāṇen’eva avacaritabbo*, DA; cf NmA 2:316,19) = M 1:167,32 (MA) = S 1:136,10 (SA) ≠ M 1:487,7 ≠ 2:172,31; A2:189,15 (*atthapadam*, glossed as “one is unable to grasp the sense by grasping it through thought, *takkena naya-g, gāhena gahetuṃ na sakkā hoti*); D 1:12,20 (*dhmmā*, glossed as “not to be delved by thought, as it is in the range of supreme knowledge,” *uttama, ñāṇa, visayattā na takkena avacaritabbā*, DA). On *atakkâvacara*, see **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,3.1.2), SD 49.8.

²¹ That is, anything improper or impossible (S 4:15,21 = 67,21 = 5:109,27 = A 5:50,17; Vism 300,21*).

²² See **Buddhism as myth**, SD 36.1.

²³ For a discussion on *bujjhi* as “discovered,” see **(Gāthā) Pañcāla, caṇḍa S** (S 2.7/1:48), SD 33.1b(2.1).

²⁴ On the difference between “awakened” and “enlightened” and the usage, see **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17 (7.4.-3.4).

²⁵ On the nature of omniscience, see (5.1).

²⁶ On the wordplay on “all” (*sabba*) here, see eg **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1.

²⁷ On a simple level, this refers to “emotional independence,” which is a spiritual characteristic that begins with streamwinning: see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

²⁸ The term was coined by European philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-77): see *Ethics* 2:44. It means “as a particular manifestation of a universal law, without any relation to time.” In western philosophy, from Spinoza onwards, it serves as an expression describing what is universally and eternally true, without any reference to or dependence upon the merely temporal aspects of reality. In simple English, *sub specie aeternitatis* roughly means

In the **the (Pāda) Doṇa Sutta** (A 4.36), the Buddha answers the brahmin Doṇa, who asks who the Buddha is, with these verses:

That by which one is born as a deva, | a gandharva who moves through the air,
by which one were to attain a yaksha state, | or were to come to the human state—
these influxes have been ended by me, | demolished, exterminated.

Just like a beautiful lotus, | undefiled by the water,
unsoiled by the world am I, | therefore, brahmin, am I buddha. (A 4.36/2:38), SD 36.13

2.2 TYPES OF BUDDHAS

2.2.0 The ancient texts often mention 2 kinds of buddhas, namely, the fully self-awakened one (*sammā, sambuddha*) and the individual buddha, who arises only in times when there is no fully self-awakened Buddha. The Commentaries, however, mention 4 classes of buddhas, that is:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (1) the omniscient buddha | <i>sabbaññū buddha</i> ; | |
| (2) the individual or pratyeka buddha | <i>pacceka buddha</i> ; | |
| (3) one awakened by the 4 truths | <i>catu, sacca buddha</i> ; | |
| (4) one awakened by deep learning | <i>bahu-s, suta buddha</i> . | (SA 1:25 f; AA 1:115; ThaA 3:189) |

2.2.1 The omniscient Buddha is a commentarial name for the fully self-awakened one (*sammā sambuddha*). He is omniscient in the sense that he can know anything he wants at any time (but not everything all the time)²⁹ [5.1]. He is said to have practised the ten perfections (*pāramī*)³⁰ [4.2.2] for one hundred thousand world-cycles (*kappa*)³¹ and four, eight or sixteen incalculables (*asaṅkheyya*).³²

2.2.2 An individual buddha or pratyeka-buddha (Pug 29) is an “independently awakened one” or “hermit buddha” (Khp:Ñ 262). The term is sometimes erroneously translated as “silent buddha” or “private buddha.” He is one who becomes a self-awakened arhat without having heard the teaching from others, comprehending the four noble truths by himself (*pacceka*), independent of any teacher. However, he lacks the capacity to proclaim the Dharma to others to awaken them, and so lacks the virtues of a fully self-awakened buddha. Pratyeka-buddhas are said to be of few words and love solitude.

Pratyeka-buddhas do not arise during a fully self-awakened buddha’s dispensation, but it is before him that they make an aspiration to become a pratyeka-buddha, followed by one hundred thousand aeons

“from the perspective of the eternal.” See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>; Garth Kemerling, *Philosophical Dictionary*, <http://www.philosophypages.com/dy/s9.htm> & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub_specie_aeternitatis.

²⁹ The nature of omniscience is discussed at length in eg **Sandaka S** (M 76/1:513-524), SD 35.7. On the Buddha’s rebuttal of Nāta,putta’s omniscience, see **Deva, dāha S** (M 101.10/2:217 f), SD 18.4. See also **Kaṇṇaka-t, thala S** (M 90/2:125-133), SD 10.8 (2).

³⁰ On the 10 perfections (*dasā pāramī*), see Bodhi (tr), “A treatise on the Paramīs,” in *The Discourse on the All-embracing Net of Views*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Soc, 1978:254-330 (tr of CA 276-332).

³¹ A **kappa** (Skt *kalpa*) usu means either (1) an average life-span (*āyu, kappa*), which in the Buddha’s time would be 120 years (DA 554,29 = SA 3:251,19; A 2:126,23; CA 11,8), or (2) an aeon (*kappa*) or “great aeon” (*mahā, kappa*), (full) world-cycle, cycle of the universe, comprising 4 phases: evolution or expansion (*vivaṭṭa kappa*), stability or fully evolved universe (*vivaṭṭa-t, thāyī kappa*), devolution or contraction (*saṁvatta kappa*), and dissolution or stasis or the “big crunch” (*saṁvatta-t, thāyī kappa*) (A 2:142,15-28, qu Vism 414,8-422,9); it is unimaginably long (S 2:178, 182; MA 2:125); 2 kinds (Nd 1:97). Each of these 4 aeons, known as “incalculable aeon” (*asaṅkheyya* or *asaṅkheyya kappa*), are in turn subdivided into 20 intermediate aeons (*antara kappa*). The full cycle of 4 incalculables is called a “great aeon” (*mahā kappa*). Our current age is one of the 20 intermediate stable aeons. (These stable aeons are the only time when life can exist). The word *asaṅkheyya*, “incalculable, uncountable,” reflects the countless years each entails (A 2:142,15, qu Vism 414,10 = CA 11,6 = ItA 2:135,20 = DAT 191,14; Miln 232). The most common values given for an *asaṅkheyya, kappa* is 10⁵¹, 10⁵⁹ or 10⁶³ years (Oxford Dict of Bsm: kalpa). See Ency Bsm: kalpa; CPD: kappa; SD 9(9c): The meaning of *kappa*.

³² ThaA 1:10 f; BA 132; CA 17, 20. *Asaṅkheyya*, by itself, simply means “incalculable,” eg “through incalculable aeons, they attained selfhood (ie a conscious body)” (*asaṅkheyyesu kappesu sakkāyādhigatā ahuṃ*, Tha 202). Here this incalculable refers to a period of a habitable world, ie one when life can exist. See prec n.

and two incalculables of practising the perfections towards that goal. The Cūḷa Niddesa attributes the **Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3) to a pratyeka-buddha (Nc 54 ff). In the **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), he is said to be one of those worthy of a stupa after death (D 2:142; A 2:245). The **Nidhi,kaṇḍa Sutta** (Khp 8) mentions “individual awakening” (*pacceka, bodhi*) (stanza 15).³³

2.2.3 A 4-truth buddha³⁴ is the arhat, one who has destroyed their mental influxes (*khīn’āsavā*),³⁵ and a **buddha of great learning** (*bahu-s, suta buddha*) refers to a truly wise person, especially one with great moral virtue.³⁶ This last term, however, is a commentarial term which is hardly used elsewhere. The term could of course be taken as referring to a Dharma-moved wise lay practitioner, or figuratively to “the enlightened learned.”

3 The past buddhas

3.1 THE NUMBER OF BUDDHAS IN AN AEON

3.1.1 Types of aeons

3.1.1.1 A buddha is the most highly evolved being in a certain world period (*kappa*; Skt *kalpa*)³⁷ of a particular universe, where up to as many as five may appear, but only one at a time,³⁸ just as a ship can have only one captain. The assumption here is clearly is that the human state is the best of existential states, so that one has to be human to become a buddha. Hence, he is said to be “the best of the two-legged.”³⁹ Or, more broadly, it is said that,

Of living beings—be they legless or two-legged, four-legged or many-legged, with form or formless, percipient or non-percipient, or neither-percipient-nor-non-percipient—the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully-self-awakened one, is reckoned the best of them.⁴⁰

3.1.1.2 The Buddha realizes or re-discovers the Dharma, the direct and clear vision into the reality of things and the liberating truth, and declares them to the world. His teaching is known as the turning of the

³³ For details, see *Buddhānussati*, SD 15.7 (4.1)n; see also **Aputtaka S** (S 3.20), SD 22.5 (2.1); **Lohicca S** (D 12) @ SD 34.8 (2.3); also M 3:68; S 1:92; U 50. See also Ria Kloppenborg, *The Pacceka Buddha*, Leiden, 1974.

³⁴ *Catu, sacca buddha*: MA 3:436; AA 2:265, 352, 3:91; DhA 4:232; ItA 2:37; SnA 1:374, 2:470; ThaA 3:142, 179; ThīA 142; PmA 3:578.

³⁵ *Asava* means “mental influxes,” the oldest list is prob a set of **3 influxes**—of sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), of existence (*bhav’āsava*), and of ignorance (*avijjāsava*), as in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33, 1.10(20)/3:216,9), **Sammā, diṭṭhi S** (M 9, 70/1:55, 10), **Āsava S** (S 38.8/4:256,4), **Ti, kaṇḍa S** (A 35.8/1:165, 16), the **(Te, vijja) Jāpussoṇi S** (A 3.59, 4/1:167), the **Nibbedhika Pariyāya S** (A 6.63). The Abhidhamma and Commentaries give a list of **4 influxes**, which is also found in the Nikāyas, that is, the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj’āsava*). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). See DBW: āsava.

³⁶ DA 3:973 = MA 3:21 = SA 3:47.

³⁷ On the **aeon** (*kappa*), see SD 2.19 (App).

³⁸ D 2:225, 3:114; M 3:65; A 1:28; Vbh 336; Nett 93; Peṭk 43. The detailed reasons for this are given in Miln 236-239 & qu at DA 3:900 f.

³⁹ “The foremost of the two-legged ... is the Tathagata ...” (*dipadānaṃ aggo ... tathāgato ...*, A 1.13.5/1:22); “the Buddha is the best of the two-legged” (*buddhaṃ ... dipad’uttamaṃ*, Sn 83; *sambuddhaṃ dipad’uttamaṃ*, 995, 998; SnA 2:160, 22-23 & Sn:N 164 n83); “The best of the two-legged is the one with the eye” (*dipadānaṃ ca cakkhumā (seṭṭho)*), Dh 273d). For other unique qualities of the Buddha, see A 1.13.1-6/1:22 f.

⁴⁰ *Yāvātā, bhikkhave, sattā apadā vā dvipadā [v] dipadā] vā catuppadā vā bahuppadā vā rūpino vā arūpino vā saññino vā asaññino vā nevasaññināsaññino vā, tathāgato tesam aggam-akkhāyati arahaṃ sammāsambuddho* (A 4.34, 1/2:34 = 10.151/5:21 = It 3.5.1/87). This statement or view raises an interesting modern problem: Is Buddhism speciesist? see eg Colette Sciberras, “Buddhism and Speciesism: On the Misapplication of Western Concepts to Buddhist Beliefs,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 15 2008:215-240, available from <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2010/05/sciberras-article.pdf>.

Dharma-wheel or the wheel of truth. The wheel has eight spokes, representing the noble eightfold path,⁴¹ which is the essence of the teaching. A wheel, once invented, need not be re-invented; the Dharma-wheel once discovered, need only to be turned to be useful, and it must move on the straight road to awakening, as it is said in the Sa,gāthā Vagga of the Saṃyutta,

<i>ujuko nāma so maggo</i>	The road is called “Straight”;
<i>abhayā nāma sā disā</i>	“Fearless” is the quarter called;
<i>ratho akūjano nāma</i>	the chariot is named “Unrattling”;
<i>dhamma,cakkehi saṃyuto</i>	fitted with the wheels of truth. (S 150*/1.46/33)

3.1.1.3 Sometimes no buddha arises in a world-period: this is a most troubling “empty aeon” (*suñña,kappa*), characterized by ignorance, baseness, selfishness, materialism, violence and what is dark in us. Sometimes only one buddha is born in an aeon, which is called “the essence aeon” (*sāra,kappa*); sometimes two, called “the cream aeon” (*maṇḍa,kappa*); sometimes three, “the blessed cycle” (*vara,kappa*); sometimes four, “the essential cream aeon” (*sāra,maṇḍa,kappa*); and rarely five, “the fortunate aeon” (*bhadda,kappa*).⁴² Ours is a fortunate aeon, with 5 buddhas, namely, Kakusandha, Koṇa’āgamaṇa, Kassapa, our buddha Gotama, and the future buddha Metteyya. [5.9.2]

3.1.2 The present aeon

3.1.2.1 Our aeon is said to be a “fortunate aeon” (*bhadda,kappa*), that is, we have the maximum number of 5 *buddhas* appearing at different times.⁴³ The question arises as to how come we have no historical records of the buddhas before Gotama? A possible answer is that the three buddhas before Gotama lived millions of years ago.⁴⁴

3.1.2.2 Ancient Buddhist cosmology regards the ancient world as comprising four continents (that is, huge islands) located around the central cosmic mountain, Mt Sumeru or Sineru (sometimes identified with the Himalayas). On the south is the Jambu,dīpa; on the west, Aparā,go,yāna; on the north, Uttara,kuru; and on the east, Pubba,videha.⁴⁵ This means that the past buddhas must have lived in the Indian sub-continent (where they are said to always arise) when it was still slowly drifting northwards from Gondwanaland across the prehistoric Tethys Ocean (today called the Indian Ocean) towards Laurasia!⁴⁶

3.1.2.3 This palaeogeological (study of the prehistoric earth) hypothesis might explain why in the Buddhist texts, ancient India is always called **Jambu,dīpa** (Skt *jambu,dvipa*), the Jambul⁴⁷ Continent. The word *dīpa* (Skt *dvīpa* = *dvi* + *āpa*, “water on both sides”) means “island.” In fact, over 60 million years ago, the Indian subcontinent was indeed an island, and it was so up to some 200 million years ago.

3.1.2.4 According to the continental drift theory—the forerunner to *the theory of plate tectonics*—the supercontinent Pangaea began to break up about 225-200 million years ago, eventually fragmenting into the continents as we know them today.⁴⁸ It was at this time that the Indian continent began to slowly migrate across the Tethys Ocean over a period of 6000 years before finally hitting the Asia (the Eurasian

⁴¹ They are right view, right thought, right action, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration: see **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117/3 1980:71-78) + SD 6.10 (1).

⁴² DA 2:411 f; BA 191; ApA 541 f. The *bhadda,kappa*: DA 2:2, 51-53, 410; KhpA 203; DhA 3:365; ItA 1:29; SnA 1:194; PvA 21; ThaA 2:85; BA 139, 252, 260; CA 8, 16, 20 f, 134, 276; J 4:328.

⁴³ In our present aeon, it is traditionally said that we have 5 buddhas, ie, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamaṇa, Kassapa, and our Buddha, Gotama, and the future Buddha, Metteyya [6].

⁴⁴ On our “fortunate aeon” (*bhadda,kappa*) and its 5 buddhas, see SD 49.8b (15.2.2).

⁴⁵ On a cosmologic level, Mt Sumeru is the axis mundi, the centre of the galaxy: see **Buddhist cosmology, SD 57.10**. For a modern study of ancient Buddhist cosmology, see Akira Sadakata, *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and origins*, tr Gaynor Sekimori, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co, 1997:25-40, esp 30-38.

⁴⁶ See **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29/5:59-65) @ SD 16.15(3). On the Tethys Ocean, Gondwanaland and Laurasia, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tethys_Ocean.

⁴⁷ The **jambul** is the black plum of India: see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29/5:59-65) @ SD 16.15 (3).

⁴⁸ See continental drift: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Drift; Pangaea: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pangaea> & the Himalayan orogeny: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geology_of_the_Himalaya.

Plate), 40-50 million years ago, giving rise to the Himalayas.⁴⁹ It is probably during this long prehistoric time (that is, before our current age) that the first three buddhas of our aeon lived.

3.1.2.5 We seem to have some traces of an ancient memory of those times. According to Saṃyutta Commentary, it is said, in the time of Kassapa Buddha (who came immediately before our own buddha Gotama), the Boar-dug Cave (*sūkara, khata, leṇa*, on the side of Mt Vulture Peak, outside Rājagaha) was just a hollow in the ground, when the earth was yet growing. In our Buddha's time, the cave entrance was high up on the hill-side and was deep (SA 3:249). This makes clear sense since we know that the Indian subcontinent is pressing against the Himalayas, pushing them up, so that they are still rising even now at about 5 mm per year!

3.1.2.6 According to the Majjhima Commentary, between the times of Kassapa Buddha and Gotama Buddha, the surface of the earth grew enough to cover the Boar-dug Cave, on the side of Mount Vulture Peak (MA 3:203). Such remarks are interesting in that they reflect an awareness that the earth as a whole was still evolving. However, more research is needed to find out if the ancient texts or teachers knew or mentioned continental drift.

3.1.2.7 These past buddhas lived in the long distant past of our present world's long prehistory. Before *our* prehistory, however, there must have been *other* historical periods during which these three buddhas arose in their own ages and civilizations, and established their dispensations. In due course, as related in **the Cakka, vatti Siha, nāda Sutta** (D 26), there was social decline and a great war,⁵⁰ or perhaps, some kind of natural disaster, during the intervening ages between the Buddha periods. Such man-made or natural events must have been catastrophic enough so that the Buddha's teachings disappeared altogether from the world in those remote times.

3.2 THE 7 BUDDHAS

3.2.1 The Pali Canon often speaks of the 7 buddhas, that is, Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa and Gotama. They are mentioned in the Vinaya, in the first Pārājika chapter,⁵¹ and in a series of seven short Saṃyutta discourses named after each of them (S 12.4-10),⁵² in the Sarabhaṅga Thera, gāthā,⁵³ in **the Mahā'padāna Sutta** (D 14),⁵⁴ and in **the Khandha, vatta Jātaka** (J 203).⁵⁵ One of the stories of the Dhammapada Commentary, **the Ānanda-t,thera Pañha Vatthu** (DhA 14.4), describes how the past seven Buddha keep their observance (*uposatha*) day.⁵⁶

3.2.2 **The Mahā'padāna Sutta** (D 14),⁵⁷ not only mentions the 7 buddhas, but also gives their details, under 11 heads (*paricchedā*), as follows:

- (1) the world-cycle or aeon (*kappa*) in which he is born, his birth or social class (*jāti*),
- (2) his family (*kula*),
- (3) his clan (*gotta*),
- (4) the average life-span of the people of that period (*āyu*),
- (5) the tree under which he attains awakening (*bodhi*),

⁴⁹ The Himalayas are the world's youngest mountain range and its highest. It is still rising by about 5 mm per year, making them geologically active. The movement of the Indian plate into the Asian plate also makes this region seismically active, leading to earthquakes from time to time: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geology_of_the_Himalaya

⁵⁰ D 26.21-22/3:72-75 @ SD 36.10.

⁵¹ In Pār 3.8, Gotama says that the first 3 of the past buddhas did neither taught the Dharma in detail (ie did not ensure that the texts were handed down) nor instituted the Pāṭimokkha, while the latter buddhas did, so that their dispensations lasted long (V 3:7,34-37; cf V 1:1,10-16).

⁵² S 12.4-10/2:5-10.

⁵³ Tha 490 f, cf Tha 1240.

⁵⁴ D 14/2:1-54 @ SD 49.8.

⁵⁵ J 203/2:147 f, but reference is only to "the seven buddhas," without naming them; cf Cv 5.6 = V2:108 f.

⁵⁶ DhA 14.4/3:236 f. This story records the Buddha's answer to Ānanda's question, and is connected with Dh 183-185, which are those of the "admonitory code" (*ovāda pāṭimokkha*): see **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74) @ SD 16.1(6): Māgha Pūja.

⁵⁷ D 14/2:1-54 @ SD 49.8.

- (6) the names of his two chief disciples (*sāvaka, yuga*),
- (7) the size of his assembly of arhats (*sāvaka, sannipāta*),
- (8) the name of his personal monk attendant (*upatthāka, bhikkhu*),
- (9) the name of his father,
- (10) the name of his mother, and
- (11) the name of his birthplace. (D 14/2:1-54), SD 49.8

The commentary on the Mahā’padāna Sutta adds these 5 headings and other details, thus:

- (12) the names of his wife and sons before his renunciation,
- (13) the conveyance (*yaṇa*) in which he leaves the world,
- (14) the monastery park in which the fragrant cell (*gandha, kuṭi*) is located, the cost of its purchase, and
- (15) the site of the monastery park, and
- (16) its chief lay patron. (DA 2:422 ff)

3.2.3 As for Gotama, the Sutta adds that on the day of his birth, there also arose the 6 connatals, that is, his future wife (Rāhula, mātā), his personal attendant (Ānanda), his horse (Kaṇṭhaka), his treasure trove (*nidhi, kumbhi*), the great awakening tree (*mahā, bodhi*) and his childhood playmate (Kāl’udāyī). The Commentary adds that Gotama is conceived, renounces the world, teaches his first sermon and performs the twin wonder under the same asterism (*nakkhatta*), that of Uttar’āsālha (June-July). In Assa, yuja (September-October), at the end of the rains-retreat, he descends from Tāvātimsa. And under the asterism of Visākha (May-June), he is born, gains awakening and in due course passes into parinirvana. In the month of Māgha (January-February), he holds his first four-factored assembly of arhats, early in the ministry,⁵⁸ and renounces his life-formations (decides to die), at its end.⁵⁹

3.2.4 In the **Upāli Sutta** (M 56), the **Sakalika Sutta** (S 1.38) and the **Paro, sahassa Sutta** (S 740), the Buddha is referred to as *isi, sattama* (“the seventh seer”), where *sattama* is a wordplay meaning “seventh,” and which includes *uttama*, “highest or best,” so that it also means “the best of seers.”⁶⁰ The commentaries on the **Upāli Sutta** (M 56) and on **Sn 356**, glossing on *isi, sattama*, only say that the Buddha arises after the other “seers” (*isi*), that is, the six preceding buddhas, namely, Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, and Kassapa.⁶¹ The Commentary on **Tha 1240** gives two explanations on the term: that (1) *isi, sattama* is the highest (*uttama*) of the seers (*isi*), namely, the disciples and pratyeka-buddhas, and (2) is the seventh (*sattama*) seer after Vipassī and other fully self-awakened ones.⁶²

This fuss over the term *isi, sattama* is understandable as it is an ancient one, going back to the Vedas, where the term refers to “the seven seers” (*sapta ṛṣi*), that is, Vasiṣṭha, Bhara, dvāja, Jamad-agni, Gautama, Atri, Visva, mitra, and Agastya,⁶³ who are said to have received some of the most important books

⁵⁸ See **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74) @ SD 16.1(6).

⁵⁹ DA 2:425; BA 131, 298. On these asterisms and lunar months, see **Dhamma, cakka-p, pavattana S** (S 56.11), SD 1.1(1)n.

⁶⁰ M 56.29/1:386*; S 1.38/1:28 @ SD 61.4 & S 740/8.8/1:192; Sn 356 (SnA 351,11); ThīA 149, 152. 154. On etym of *isi*, see Thī:N 75 (n60). The **Apadāna** has *isi, sattama* (Ap 538.29/2:490) & these vll: (VRI) *isi, sattama*, (Ce) *isisuttama* (wr?), Be Ee Se (*puris’uttama* (the supreme person) (Ap 541.14/2:496).

⁶¹ MA 3:97; SnA 2:351. See M 56.29/1:386*. On the 7 buddhas, see **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14.1.4/2:2), SD 49.8.

⁶² *Isīnaṃ isi, sattamo ti, sāvaka, pacceka, buddha, isīnaṃ uttamo isi; vipassī, sammā, sambuddhato paṭṭhāya isīnaṃ vā sattamako isi* (ThaA 3:195). K R Norman suggests that of these two interpretations, “the former is more likely to be correct, cf the Jain epithet *jina, sattama* (Isibh[āsiyāim, W Schubring, Göttigen, 1942-51:] 38.12) where there is no reason for assuming any meaning other than ‘best’.” (Tha:N 294 n1240). MA 3:97 (on **Upāli S**, M 1:386*) gives only the second explanation, as does SA 1:278 (on S 1:192) and SnA 351 (on Sn 356 = Tha 1276). See also S:B 464 n519.

⁶³ This forms the oldest list, found in Jaiminiya Upaniṣad (JU 2.218-221). Brhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad lists them as Gautama, Bhara, dvāja, Viśvā, mitra, Jamad-agni, Vasiṣṭha and Kaśyapa (BAU 2.2.4). Vedic mythology considers these 7 seers as the 7 stars of Ursa Major (ie the Plough or Big Dipper) (Joel Brereton, “Cosmographic Images in the

and verses of the Vedas, and considered to be the progenitors of the orthodox brahmin lineages. The Jains, too, have their *jina,sattama* (“the seventh conqueror”) (Isibhāsiyāim 38.12), which is likely to be an older term than the Buddhist one.

Such popular sacred terms are useful bridges to present Buddhist cognates so that the masses find something familiar, at least in terms of religious terminology. More vital than sacred terms is what they stand for or point to. While the other terms refer to sacred persons worthy of our reverence and for supplicating in times of need, the 7 buddhas represent a kind of convenient self-help religious kit that cuts across all faiths and classes. Even in later Buddhism, when these buddhas are viewed just as the Hindus and Jains view their seven sages, the possibility of self-awakening is not lost, that is, if we care to look beyond the material religiosity.

3.3 THE 24 PAST BUDDHAS

3.3.1 Sources on the past buddhas. The legend of the “past buddhas” probably began and grew in the **Mahā’padāna Sutta** (D 14),⁶⁴ so that by the time **the Buddha,vaṁsa** was compiled, there is a total of 25 buddhas, 24 past ones [3.4] and Gotama as the 25th.⁶⁵ All the first 24 buddhas confirmed the advent of Gotama. **The Buddhavaṁsa Commentary** gives similar details for each of the 25 buddhas under 22 headings, with these additional 7 heads, that is, the details of the following:

- (17) the first discourse,
- (18) the number of those realizing the truth (*abhisamaya*) at each assembly,
- (19) the names of the two chief women-disciples,
- (20) the Buddha’s height and the extent of his aura (*raṁsī*),
- (21) the name of the Bodhisattva (who is to become Gotama Buddha), the prophecy concerning him, and his exertions (*padhāna*), and
- (22) the details of the Buddha’s parinirvana.

The Commentary adds that the duration in which each buddha lives as a householder, the names of the palaces he occupies, the number of his dancing women, the names of his chief wife and his son, his conveyance, his renunciation, his practice of austerities, his patrons, and his monastery. (BA 2 f)

3.3.2 Characteristics of the buddhas

3.3.2.1 There are 8 distinguishing characteristics (*aṭṭha vematta*) in which the 25 buddhas differ from one other. These are

- (1) the life-span in the age in which he is born,
- (2) his height,
- (3) his social rank (some are born as kshatriyas, others as brahmins),
- (4) the duration of his austerities,
- (5) the extent of his body’s aura,⁶⁶
- (6) the conveyance in which he makes his renunciation,
- (7) the tree under which he gains awakening, and
- (8) the size of the seat (*pallaṅka*) under the Bodhi tree. (BA 106)

The Commentary also gives details under each of these eight headings for each of the 25 buddhas (BA 246 f). The Dīgha Commentary, however, gives only the first five (DA 2:424).

3.3.2.2 Both the Commentaries, however, say that, for all the buddhas, there are 4 fixed spots (*avijāhita-t,thāna*), which, in the case of Gotama, are as follows:

- (1) the seat under the Bodhi tree (*bodhi,pallanka*),
- (2) the deer park at Isipatana where the first discourse is given,
- (3) the spot where he first steps on the ground at Saṅkassa on his descent from Tāvātimsa, and

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 34 1991:2-7). Yet other lists appear in later Upaniṣads. Some of these names appear in **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49,9/4:62), SD 2.3.

⁶⁴ D 14/2:1-54 (SD 49.8).

⁶⁵ They are listed by name at DhA 1:83 f.

⁶⁶ In the case of Maṅgala, his aura pervaded the ten thousand world system, while that of Gotama extended only 1 fathom. However, when a buddha wishes, he can spread his aura at will.

(4) the spots marked by the four posts of his bed in the fragrant cell (*gandha, kuṭi*) in Jeta, vana.

The Buddha's monastery-park and the city near where it stands may vary. That is to say, the location of the Buddha's bed (its legs) are fixed, but the monastery-park might be located in a different direction relative to it (DA 2:424; BA 298). [5.5.2]

3.3.2.3 The Buddha, vaṃsa Commentary further lists the following 30 points common to all the bud-dhas (*sama, timsa, vidhā dhammatā*), namely:

- (1) The Bodhisattva descends into his mother's womb (for conception), clearly comprehending that it is his last birth.⁶⁷
- (2) In his mother's womb, he remains cross-legged facing outwards.⁶⁸
- (3) His mother delivers him in a standing position.
- (4) The nativity occurs only in a forest.
- (5) As soon as he is born, he stands on a piece of golden cloth, takes seven steps to the north, survey the four quarters, and gives the "lion-roar."⁶⁹
- (6) He renounces the world after seeing the four sights and just after a son is born to him.
- (7) Upon wearing the monk's robe ("the banner of the arhat," *arahad, dhaja*), he practises self-mortification for at least seven days.⁷⁰
- (8) He has a meal of milk-rice on the day of his awakening.
- (9) He attains omniscience (awakening) while sitting on a grass-seat.
- (10) He practises samadhi by way of in-and-out-breathing.⁷¹
- (11) He defeats Māra's forces;⁷²
- (12) While seated cross-legged under the Bodhi tree, he gains the three knowledges⁷³ and other qualities such as those that are unique to the Buddha.⁷⁴
- (13) He spends 7 weeks in the vicinity of the Bodhi tree.⁷⁵
- (14) Mahā Brahmā requests him to teach the Dhamma.⁷⁶
- (15) He gives the first discourse in the Deer Park at Isipatana.⁷⁷
- (16) On the full-moon day of Māgha (January-February), he recites the Ovāda Pātimokkha to the four-factored assembly.⁷⁸

⁶⁷ *Pacchima, bhavika, bodhisattassa sampajānassa mātu, kucchi, okkamanam* (BA 298): an alternative tr is "In his last birth, the Bodhisattva, fully aware, descends into his mother's womb (for conception),"

⁶⁸ On nos 2-6, see **Acchariya, abbhūta S** (M 123/3:118-124), SD 52.2.

⁶⁹ See **Acchariya, abbhūta S** (M 123.20/3:123), SD 52.2.

⁷⁰ According to **Apadāna**, our Buddha, in his past life as the monk *Joti, pāla*, reviles Kassapa Buddha, claiming that awakening is impossible under a "baldy" such as him. As a karmic consequence, our Buddha has to spend 6 painful years of self-mortification (Ap 387.29/1:301 = UA 265 f; ApA 114 f); see also **Ghāṭikara S** (M 81,6-23/-2:46-54), SD 49.3. On the Bodhisattva's self-mortification, see **Mahā Sīha.nāda S** (M 12,44-62/1:77-83), SD 49.1.

⁷¹ See **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118/3:77-88), SD 7.13.

⁷² See **Māra**, SD 61.8.

⁷³ The 3 knowledges (*te, vijja*) are: (1) retrocognition (*pubbe, nivāsānussati, ñāṇa*), that is, the recollection of past lives; the divine eye (*dibba, cakkhu*) or clairvoyance; and (3) the knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes (*āsava-k, khaya, ñāṇa*), that ends rebirth. (D 3:281; M 1:34; A 1:255, 258, 3:17, 280, 4:421): See **Te, vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8(2.2).

⁷⁴ See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26.18-19/1:167 f), SD 1.11.

⁷⁵ U 1:1-3; cf Mv 1.1-4 = V 1:1-4. See **Dhamma & Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1 (5).

⁷⁶ See **Why the Buddha "hesitated" to teach**, SD 12.1.

⁷⁷ See **Dhamma, cakka-p, pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:420-424), SD 1.1.

⁷⁸ Comy notes that this occurs at the end of the teaching of **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74). It is called the "four-factored assembly" (*catur-aṅgika, sannipāta*) because: (1) it is the full moon observance day of the month of Māgha; (2) 1250 monks have assembled spontaneously (*dhammatāya*), unprompted (*anāmantiṭāni*); (3) they are all arhats of the six-fold superknowledges (*cha-l-abhiññā*); and (4) they are all personally been admitted by the Buddha with the words, "Come, O monk!" (*ehi, bhikkhu*) (MA 3:209, BA 126; also DA 2:425; BA 131). The Pātimokkha referred to here is

- (17) He regularly resides in Jetavana.
- (18) He performs the twin wonder at the gateway of Sāvattihī.⁷⁹ [See below.]
- (19) He teaches the Abhidhamma in Tāvatisa.⁸⁰
- (20) He descends from the deva-world at the gate of Saṅkassa.⁸¹
- (21) He constantly dwells in the bliss of the attainment of the fruits (*phala, samāpatti*).⁸²
- (22) He seeks out those who have the capacity or tractability for conversion in two sessions.⁸³
[5.6.1]
- (23) He lays down a training-rule only after the occasion for it arises.⁸⁴
- (24) He relates a Jātaka story when the occasion warrants it.
- (25) He relates the Buddha-lineage (*buddha, vamsa*) in the assembly of his kinsmen.
- (26) He always greets visiting monks courteously.⁸⁵
- (27) He spends the rains-retreat where invited and does not leave without taking leave.
- (28) He follows a daily routine [chores] before and after meals, and during the three watches of the night. [5.6]
- (29) On the day of his final nirvana, he takes a meal that tastes of meat (*maṃsa, rasa, bhojana*).⁸⁶
- (30) He attains final nirvana after having attained the twenty-four hundred thousand crores of meditative attainments.⁸⁷ (BA 298 f)

3.3.2.4 The same Commentary closes by mentioning the four stumbling-blocks (*anantarāyikā dhammā*) from which all buddhas are immune, that is, there can be no stumbling-block to them in regards to⁸⁸

- (1) their obtaining any of the 4 supports (alms-food, robes, shelter, medical support) that is intended for them;
- (2) their life-span (that is, they will live out their natural life-span);⁸⁹ [5.9]
- (3) any of their 32 marks of the great man or the 80 lesser marks;⁹⁰ and
- (4) their aura (that is, nothing can block it). (BA 299)

3.3.2.5 The Sutta Nipāta Commentary says that wherever a buddha is present, no other light can shine within 80 cubits⁹¹ (about 3.3 m or 11 ft) radius of him (SnA 2:525). The Commentaries add that at

the “admonitory code” (*ovāda pāṭimokkha*, Dh 183-185). This sacred say is often called Māgha Pūjā or Sangha Day. See **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74), SD 16.1 (6).

⁷⁹ See **Miraculous stories**, SD 27.5b (3.2.2).

⁸⁰ See **Dhamma & Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1 (6.3).

⁸¹ See **Miraculous stories**, SD 27.5b (3.2.1).

⁸² See **Samādhi, bhāvanā S** (A 4.41.6/2:45 f), SD 24.1 (1.2).

⁸³ *Dvīsu vāresu veneyya, janāvalokanāṃ*.

⁸⁴ On the context of the Vinaya and training-rules, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

⁸⁵ **Kūṭa, danta S** (D 5) says: “Indeed, sirs, the recluse Gotama is one who bids all welcome, congenial, courteous, never frowning, approachable, the first to greet others [the first to speak]” (D 5.7(18)/1:132) = 22.8.

⁸⁶ **The Buddha’s last meal**. If we accept this tradition, it we are more certain that the Buddha’s last meal is a pork dish: see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 9.4.18-20/2:127 f) + SD 9(13b).

⁸⁷ *Catu, vīsati, koṭi, sata, saḥassa, samāpattiyo samāpajjitvā parinibbānan ti*. The number can be written thus: $24 \times 100,000 \times 10,000,000 = 24,000,000,000,000$. This astronomically huge figure reflects the growing fascination with numbers as society then becomes more familiar with large or astronomical numbers. Here, it symbolizes the boundlessness of his mind.

⁸⁸ **Milinda, pañha** gives the foll 4 stumbling blocks which would never arise for the Buddha, ie, with regards to his receiving a gift meant for him, to his aura, his omniscience, and his life (*jīvita*) (Miln 157).

⁸⁹ Cf DA 2:413. On the Buddha’s life-span (*āyu, kappā*), see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 9) @ SD 9 (9c).

⁹⁰ On the Buddha’s bodily marks of the great man, see **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7(4.10); **On women’s inabilities**, SD 29.1b(2.3n); & **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30), SD 36.9(3).

⁹¹ This clearly refers to the Buddha’s bodily radiance and its extent. Such a radiance is often attributed to holy beings and is represented in art by a mandorla (around the body) or a halo (around the head). A cubit (*ratana*) here, according to Comy, that of a medium-sized man (UA 245), ie, twice the distance between the tips of the thumb and

the end of the first week after his awakening, the Buddha, to dispel the devas' doubt about his liberation, rises into the air and displays the twin wonder (*yamaka pāṭihāriya*), where fine jets of fire and of water shoot out from each of his pores, dancing around his body, forming a magnificent mandorla enveloping him.⁹² Technically, this miracle is an example of the Buddha's *transfiguration*.⁹³ [5.7]

3.3.2.6 Without any other means of expressing the bliss and liberation of inner awakening, the ancient teachers spun myths and stories to hold the pious and insecure masses in their awe and beauty. What even a crowd is incapable of attaining must surely be of great power; for a crowd does not think. A crowd feels, but feels only for immediate palpable things. Whoever can spin such myths presents, as it were, immediate palpable wonders that hold the crowd. This is the religion of miracles and the masses, the religion of the crowd, the pre-modern mass media.

3.4 THE 28 BUDDHAS

3.4.1 Chapter 27 of **the Buddha,vaṃsa** mentions three other buddhas—Taṇhānkara, Medhānkara, and Saraṇānkara⁹⁴—as arising before Dīpaṅkara in the same aeon, so that the canonical list now totals 28 buddhas, that is, 27 past buddhas preceding Gotama. This lordly roll of 27 buddhas (excluding Gotama) is listed in **the Jātaka Nidāna** (the introduction to the Jātaka Commentary)⁹⁵ as follows:

<i>Taṇhānkaro medhānkaro atho'pi saraṇānkaro dīpaṅkaro ca sambuddho koṇḍañño dvi,pad'uttamo</i>	Taṇhānkara, Medhānkara, and Saraṇānkara, too, Dīpaṅkara the self-awakened, and Koṇḍañña, supreme amongst the two-legged,
<i>maṅgalo ca sumano ca revato sobhito muni anomadassī padumo nārado pad'umuttaro</i>	and Maṅgala, and Sumana, Revata, Sobhita the sage, Anoma,dassī, Paduma, Nārada, Padum'uttara,
<i>sumedho ca sujāto ca piya,dassī mahā,yaso attha,dassī dhamma,dassī siddhattho loka,nāyako</i>	and Sumedha, and Sujāta, Piya,dassī, of great fame, Attha,dassī, Dhamma,dassī, Siddhattha, leader of the world,
<i>tisso phusso ca sambuddho vipassī sikhī vessabhū kakusandho koṇāgamano kassapo cāti nāyako</i>	Tissa and Phussa the self-awakened, Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, and Kassapa the leader.
<i>ete ahesuṃ sambuddhā vīta,rāgā samāhitā sata,raṃsī'va uppannā mahā,tama,vinodanā jalitvā aggi,khandhāva nibbutā te sa,sāvaka ti</i>	These are the self-awakened ones, free from lust, attained to samadhi, who have arisen like the hundred-rayed (sun), dispeller of the great darkness, having burst ablaze like pillars of fire, they are cooled, along with their disciples, too.

3.4.2 The Jātaka Commentary says that our Bodhisattva went before all these buddhas, except the first three. Taṇhānkara, Medhānkara and Saraṇānkara were buddhas of the same cycle as Dīpaṅkara, but,

of the index finger with the fingers outstretched (VbhA 343), which would be about 16 ins or 41 cm. As such, 8 cubits would be about 10 ft 8 ins or 3.28 m. See **UA:M 608 f, esp 692-694 (n491)** on such ancient measurements. See also **Juṃhā S** (U 4.4.4/40) n @ SD 24.9.

⁹² MA 2:184; UA 51; BA 8; J 1:77.

⁹³ See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.4.37/2:133 f), SD 9 & **Miracles**, SD 27.5 (2): The transfiguration.

⁹⁴ B 27.1/100; BA 62, 131; cf CA 12 f. regarding these buddhas and the aeons, see B:H xxvi & DA 410 f.

⁹⁵ J 1:44 = J:J 1990:56.

at this early stage, they did not confirm him as the Bodhisattva. Gotama's aspiration to become a full self-awakened Buddha is first made (as Sumedha) before Dīpaṅkara, who confirms that he would become the future Buddha.⁹⁶

3.4.3 Apparently, these verses were expanded into a late Sinhala paritta (in the form of a stotra),⁹⁷ entitled **Atavisi Pirith** (P *aṭṭha, vīsati paritta*). Here is the Pirith in full (with the buddhas in the order of their appearance):

(1)	(27) ⁹⁸	<i>taṇhaṅkaro mahā, vīro</i>	Taṇhaṅ, kara	the great hero,
(2)	(26)	<i>medhaṅ, karo mahā, yaso</i>	Medhaṅ, kara,	of great fame,
(3)	(25)	<i>saraṇaṅ, karo loka, hito</i>	Saraṇaṅ, kara,	benefactor of the world,
(4)	(24)	<i>dīpaṅ, karo jutin, dharo</i>	Dīpaṅ, kara,	the light-bearer.
(5)	(23)	<i>koṇḍañño jana, pāmokkho</i>	Koṇḍañña,	the people's leader,
(6)	(22)	<i>maṅgalo purisāsabho</i>	Maṅgala,	the bull of a person [the bellwether of men],
(7)	(21)	<i>sumano sumano dhīro</i>	Sumana,	the wise with a kindly heart,
(8)	(20)	<i>revato rati, vaddhano</i>	Revata,	the enhancer of joy.
(9)	(19)	<i>sobhito guṇa, sampanno</i>	Sobhita,	accomplished in virtue,
(10)	(18)	<i>anoma, dassī jan'uttamo</i>	Anoma, dassī,	the generation's best [the highest of men],
(11)	(17)	<i>padumo loka, pajjoto</i>	Paduma,	the lamp of the world,
(12)	(16)	<i>nārada vara, sarathī</i>	Nārada,	the noble charioteer.
(13)	(15)	<i>padum'uttaro satta, sāro</i>	Padum'uttara,	the most excellent of beings,
(14)	(14)	<i>sumedho agga, puggalo</i>	Sumedha,	the foremost of individuals,
(15)	(13)	<i>sujāto sabba, lok'aggo</i>	Sujāta,	the foremost of all the world,
(16)	(12)	<i>piya, dassī narāsabho</i>	Piya, dassī,	the bull of a man.
(17)	(11)	<i>attha, dassī kāruṇiko</i>	Attha, dassī,	the compassionate,
(18)	(10)	<i>dhamma, dassī tamo, nudo</i>	Dhamma, dassī,	the dispeller of darkness,
(19)	(9)	<i>siddhattho asamo loka</i>	Siddhattha,	peerless in the world,
(20)	(8)	<i>tisso varado, saṁvaro</i>	Tissa,	restrained, giver of blessings.
(21)	(7)	<i>phusso varada, sambuddho</i>	Phussa,	self-awakened, the giver of blessings,
(22)	(6)	<i>vipassī ca anupamo</i>	Vipassī,	the unmatched,
(23)	(5)	<i>sikhī sabba, hito satthā</i>	Sikhī,	the teacher who benefits all,
(24)	(4)	<i>vessabhū sukha, dāyako</i>	Vessa, bhū,	the giver of joy.
(25)	(3)	<i>kakusandho sattha, vāho</i>	Kakusandha,	the caravan leader,
(26)	(2)	<i>koṇ'āgamaṇo raṇ'añjaho</i>	Koṇ'āgamaṇa,	who has given up strife,
(27)	(1)	<i>kassapo siri, sampanno</i>	Kassapa,	endowed with radiance,
(28)		<i>gotamo sakya, puṅgavo</i>	Gotama,	the Sakya bull.

*tesaṁ saccena sīlena
khanti, metta, balena ca
te'pi maṁ anurakkhantu
ārogyena sukkena cā ti*

By the truth of their moral virtue,
patience, lovingkindness and power,
may their protect me, too,
with health and happiness!

⁹⁶ The last 24 buddhas, from Dīpaṅkara to Kassapa, are better known in Comys (J 1:28-45; ApA 32-51; DhA 1:83; BA 131 f; CA 15). All the 28 past buddhas are mentioned in DA 2:410.

⁹⁷ A *stotra* (Skt) is a hymn of praise, usu in Sanskrit, popular in devotional and theistic Hinduism.

⁹⁸ This column gives the “reverse numbering” of the past Buddhas counting backwards from Gotama. As such, Kassapa is the “first past Buddha” before Gotama, and so on.

*aṭṭha, vīsati me buddhā
pūretvā dasa, pāramī
jetvā mārāri, saṅgāmaṃ
buddhattaṃ samupāgamuṃ
etena saccena, vajjena
hotu me jaya, maṅgalaṃ*

These twenty-eight buddhas,
having fulfilled the ten perfections,
having routed Māra and his enemy host,
are attainers of Buddhahood—
by the power of this truth,
may there be joyous victory for me.

4 The present Buddha

4.1 THE BODHISATVA'S 5 INVESTIGATIONS. The Bodhisattva who later becomes Vipassī Buddha remains in Tusita during the whole of the natural duration (57 crores and 60,000 years). Most Bodhisattvas, however, leave Tusita before completing the full span of lives there. Five signs warn the devaputra of his impending “fall” (*cuti*) from his heaven,⁹⁹ and the gods of the ten-thousand worlds gather around him, beseeching him to be born on earth that he may become the Buddha. The Bodhisattva thereupon makes the 5 investigations (*pañca mahā, vilokana*), that is, regarding (1) the prevailing human life-span, (2) the continent, (3) the country, (4) the family, and (5) the mother. (BA 273 f)

A buddha is born only in this universe (*cakka, vāla*) out of the ten thousand universes which constitute the “birth-field” (*jāti-k, khetta*) (DA 3:897; AA 2:341). There can only be one buddha in the world at a time (D 2:225, 3:114),¹⁰⁰ the reasons for which are given in detail in **the Milinda, pañha**.¹⁰¹ No Buddha can arise until the dispensation (*sāsana*) of the previous Buddha has completely disappeared from the world, which occurs only with the passing away of the relics (*dhātu, parinibbāna*) [5.7].

When a bodhisattva descends from Tusita into his mother's womb in his last life, a beautiful radiance manifests itself throughout the world, and the ten-thousand world-systems tremble. Similar earth tremors occur when he is born, when he gains awakening, when he gives the first discourse, when he relinquishes his life-formations, and when he finally passes away.¹⁰²

No buddha arises in a devolving universe (*samvaṭṭamāna kappa*), but only during an evolving universe (*vivaṭṭamāna kappa*) (SnA 1:51). No buddha is born in the early period of an evolving cycle of the universe, when humans live longer than a hundred thousand years and are thus unable to recognize the nature of decay and death, and therefore unable to benefit from his teaching. On the other hand, when human life is too short, there is no time for exhorting them as they are full of mental defilements and as such lack proper attentiveness. The time conducive for the arising for a buddha is, therefore, when the human life-span is *not less than one hundred years and not more than ten thousand*.

Buddhas are born only in Jambu, dīpa (that is, the Indian sub-continent), and there, too, only in the “middle country” (*majjhima, desa*) (that is, the middle Gangetic plain). The reasons for this are quite obvious. India at that time, was advanced in its religious life and reached a high level of sociocultural growth known as *the second urbanization* (the first being that of the Indus valley, c 23500-1800 BCE).

The family that a buddha is born into is always either brahmin or kshatriya, the two highest social classes (the priestly and the political respectively), whichever is the predominant at that time. In the 6th-5th

⁹⁹ The 5 signs or omens: see **Pañca Pubba, nimitta S** (It 3.4.4/76-78), SD 23.8a(1.2).

¹⁰⁰ “It is not possible, bhikkhus, there is no chance that two (or more) arhat, fully self-awakened ones would simultaneously arise in a single universe [world-system]” (*aṭṭhānam etaṃ, bhikkhave, anavakāso yaṃ ekissā loka, dhātuyā dve arahanto sammā, sambuddhā apubbaṃ acarimaṃ uppajjeyyūṃ*, **Mahā Govinda S** (D 19, 14/2:225) = **Sampasādaniya S** (D 28, 19/3:114) = **Aṭṭhana Pāli** (A 1.15.10/1:27 f); see also Kvu 21.6/608 f; Abhidharma, kośa (tr Pruden) Abdhk 3.95-96(3) (Abdhk:Pr 2:484). It is interesting that **Kathā, vatthu** argues against the Mahā, saṅghika view of many buddhas in a world system by *challenging them to name those buddhas* (Kvu 21.6/608 f; KvuA 190). Presumably, there were none at that time. However, in due course, as we well know, the name of numerous buddhas were introduced.

¹⁰¹ Miln 236; qu in DA 3:900 f.

¹⁰² On the causes of earth-tremors, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.11-12/2:108 f; cf DA 3:897).

centuries, the kshatriyas were predominant in the middle Gangetic plain. With their political activities, too, the foundations of imperial India were laid.¹⁰³

The mother of a buddha must not only be wise and virtuous, but her life-span must end within seven days of the buddha's birth. It is possible to explain this as not to allow any sibling rivalry, as the buddha has to be a unique individual as a world teacher. Secondly, the mother should not bear any more children who might be considered as "successors" to buddhahood. [4.2.1]

4.2 THE BUDDHA'S CONCEPTION

4.2.1 Queen Mahā Māyā. Having made these decisions, the Bodhisattva in Tusita goes to the Nandana, vana, the Forest of Delighting, and while wandering there, "falls away" from Tusita and descends into conception. He is aware of his death but unaware of his "death-consciousness" or dying thought (*cuti, citta*). The Commentators differ as to whether he is aware of his conception. When the Bodhisattva is conceived, his mother has no sexual desire. In fact, for the preceding seven days, she has been observing the uposatha precepts, one of which being that of celibacy.

On the day of the conception, after the Āsālha festival, Māyā, having bathed in scented water, and eaten choice food, keeps the uposatha vows and retires to the royal bed-chamber. As she sleeps, she dreams that the Four Great Kings (the guardian gods of the four quarters) raise her bed with her in it and take her through the skies to the Himālaya. There their queens bathe her in the lake Anotattā,¹⁰⁴ robe her in divine raiment, anoint her with perfumes and deck her with heavenly flowers (J 1:50).

Nearby is a silver mountain upon which is a golden mansion. There they lay her with her head to the east. The Bodhisattva, in the form of a six-tusked albino elephant, enters her room, and after circling rightwise three times around her bed, smites her right side with his trunk and enters her womb. She wakes and relates the dream to her husband, the rajah Suddhodana. He summons the soothsayers who prophesy the birth of one destined to become either a world ruler (*cakka, vatti*) or a world teacher, the buddha.

4.2.2 The miraculous conception. The *Mahā'pādāna Sutta* (D 14) and the *Acchariyābbhuta, - dhamma Sutta* (M 12) mention other miracles that attend the conception and birth of the buddha.¹⁰⁵ Later books (such as the *Jātaka Commentary*, J 1) expand on these accounts. They relate how the Bodhisattva, having practised the 30 perfections (three grades of the 10 perfections)¹⁰⁶ [1.2], made the 5 great sacrifices (*pañca mahā, pariccāgā*), defined by the Commentaries as making the sacrifices of

- BA 1**¹⁰⁷ one's limb, one's life, one's wealth, one's kingdom, one's wife and children;
ItA 1:8 one's self, one's eye, one's wealth, one's kingdom, one's wife and children;
J 6:552 f one's wealth, a limb, one's life, one's children, one's wife.

On account of these sacrifices, the Bodhisattva reaches the apex of his threefold conduct (*cariyā*), that is, conduct benefitting relatives (*ñāt'attha, cariyā*), conduct benefitting the world (*lok'attha, cariyā*) and

¹⁰³ See eg Romila Thapar, *A History of India* 1, Penguin Books, 1966:50-69 (ch 3) & *Early India*, Penguin Books, 2002:134-156 (on Magadha).

¹⁰⁴ *Anotattā* or *Anodahā* (BHS *anavataptā*, "with no heat") (for etym, see SnA 2:438,9 ≠ M 3:36,5 = UA 301,3). One of the 7 large lakes (*mahā, sāra*) in Himavat (the Himalayas) (J 4:497,31, cf 92,26; listed at A 4:101, 13; J 5:-415,25; DA 1:164,4 = MA 3:232,4; MA 3:35,8; SnA 2:407,22; UA 300,14; Vism 416,19). The 7 lakes form the source of the 5 great rivers (*mahā, nadī*) (A 4:101,13; Miln 286,25. Its water used by the Buddha (J 1:80,15 qu DhsA 16,14; DhA 3:222,12; Vism 391,8). For discussion, see Sadakata 1997:35. See CPD sv.

¹⁰⁵ D 14,1.17-30/2:12-15 @ SD 49.8 & M 12,3.3-22/3:119-124 @ SD 49.1.

¹⁰⁶ ItA 8, 117; the three grades as the perfection (*pāramī*) (eg charity), higher perfection (*upapāramī*) (eg sacrifice of one's own limb), and the ultimate perfection (*paramattha pāramī*) (ie the giving of one's life) (BA 59); also Dasa, bodhisatt'uppatti, kathā 10.

¹⁰⁷ Also DA, MA, AA .

conduct benefitting buddhas (*buddh'attha, cariyā*)¹⁰⁸—makes the 7 great gifts (*mahā dānā*),¹⁰⁹ as in the case of Vessantara,¹¹⁰ making the earth tremble seven times, and upon dying, he is reborn in Tusita.¹¹¹

4.2.3 Liberation, not affiliation

4.2.3.1 FOR THE GOOD OF THE MANY. That the Bodhisattva's conduct benefits others in three ways—his family, the world and the buddhas—is highly significant. As a bodhisattva, he makes supreme sacrifices, not only of his worldly wealth and wisdom, but even his lives, not one but many, over many births. All this is the basis for his impending awakening as the buddha, when he would win spiritual wealth, wisdom and wellbeing, so that he will in turn inspire others to tap their own capacity for self-awakening and inspiring them to self-awaken.

The significance here is unrivalled in religious history, but not always apparent—that is, both as the bodhisattva and as the buddha, *Gotama is not starting a new religion*, but is celebrating our capacity for supreme awakening (hence, liberation from suffering) and our capability for immeasurable good (to show others how they can themselves awaken). The Buddha's teaching, in other words, is not about being members of a group, but about *being free of the group*, of seeing *the totality of all life as a single spiritual family*. The Buddha Dharma is not about affiliation but about liberation. [4.2.3.4]

4.2.3.2 THE “NOT-BUDDHISTS.” Some professionals and writers in our times, drawn to some vital aspects of Buddhism, such as its philosophy, psychology, or religiosity, see a worthwhile advantage in adopting it, as it would enhance their own profession, philosophy, or religiosity. Yet, in due course, they declare themselves as “not Buddhist,” and in some cases, they would go on use some professional or catchy label (copyrighted in their name) for their brand of philosophy, practice or religion. It would be interesting to examine the significance and implications of such developments (such as their impact on Buddhism). Tersely but ironically, it is as if we are claiming that the buddha teaches not a affiliation, but an “attitude.”¹¹²

Some might construe such attitudes as exploiting Buddhism for our own purposes and profit. However, the situation is much more complex. In 2005, US psychotherapist and veteran of “Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction” (MBSR), **Jon Kabat-Zinn**, for example, famously declared in an interview that he is “not a Buddhist.”¹¹³ He is one of the most famous examples of the “not-Buddhists,” but the label is perhaps legion now. I think an important reason for professionals distancing themselves from Buddhism as a religion is mainly because of the numerous and protracted scandals (usually involving emotional abuse, sexual exploitations and financial irregularities), especially amongst high-profile Tibetan gurus and Zen masters.¹¹⁴ Another reason is a practical one, the “not-Buddhists” do not have to depend on any affluent Buddhist or Buddhist organization for funds, and can therefore be open with their minds.

On a less professional level, astute young Buddhist graduates, however, have to forego this precious windfall, especially when they work for an affluent temple organization, earning market-rate salaries. They quickly learn that they have to limit their genius and energies to the temple agenda, as is well

¹⁰⁸ ItA 1:8; ApA 78; J 1:73; DhA 3:441; CA 330.

¹⁰⁹ DA 2:427.

¹¹⁰ J 547/6:479-593. Vessantara gives away the 7 × 700 of elephants, horses, chariots, girls, cows, men slaves and women slaves, and various kinds of food and drinks (J 547/6:493 f, 504 f). It should be noted that these material gifts, more to show the magnitude of his wealth as the Bodhisattva (in his last birth) than what would truly benefit the recipient, which is yet to come when he becomes the Buddha.

¹¹¹ In this connection, see SD 48,2 (6.3) The giving of the body.

¹¹² Cf eg Belinda Siew Luan KHONG, “The Buddha teaches an attitude, not an affiliation,” 2003.

¹¹³ In *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness* (Hyperion, 2005), he writes: “Because I practice and teach mindfulness, I have the recurring experience that people frequently make the assumption that I am a Buddhist. When asked, I usually respond that I am not a Buddhist (although there was a period in my life when I did think of myself in that way, and trained and continue to train in and have huge respect and love for different Buddhist traditions and practices), but I am a student of Buddhist meditation, and a devoted one, not because I am devoted to Buddhism per se, but because I have found its teachings and its practices to be so profound and so universally applicable, revealing and healing.” (2005:26)

¹¹⁴ See eg **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17.

known, for example, in early 21st century Singapore.¹¹⁵ Invariably, the turn-over for such temple executives and administrators are very high. Academically, they would serve as rich informants for sociologists studying the nature of contemporary Buddhism, such as “Buddhism as a business.”

4.2.3.3 THE “ONE-WAY” BUDDHISTS. On the other extreme, we have the “one-way” Buddhists, who basically claim that only their brand or branch of Buddhism is right and true, all else false. There was a time, around the late 20th century, when certain Theravada zealots, inspired by their meditation teachers, who claim that “Vipassana” was the “one and only way” to awakening, often invoking the opening of the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (D 22).¹¹⁶ Although such teachers generally came from Myanmar, these zealots were often vocal in Malaysia, and to a lesser degree in Singapore.

Such “one-way” teachers, and their followers echoing them, generally denounced other forms of meditation, even lovingkindness meditation (claiming that it is not a “true” Buddhist meditation). Their followers were discouraged, even disallowed, to read any unapproved books, Buddhist or not, as they only preach “false Dhamma.” Any sociologist or psychologist of religion, or anyone who is sapient, would see this attitude as really a nervous fear on the part of such fundamentalist teachers that this exclusivism was aimed at preventing their followers from being drawn away by outside ideas, and hence be less prone to domestication.

It is understandable if such teachers were ethnically Burmese, as Buddhism was and is a state religion in Myanmar, protected and patronized by the authorities. Dissent from the laity was not kindly tolerated, certainly much less than today, with a more globalized Buddhism. Another reason for the intolerance of these traditional teachers was that their followers were generally uninformed of the Buddhist suttas and meditation, and tend to be easily swayed by popular beliefs (eg that “demons” could appear in our meditations) or populist opinions (eg that meditation is only for monks or should only be taught by them).

4.2.3.4 LIBERATION. The key difference here is that while the “not-Buddhists” [4.2.3.2] are capable of keeping or gaining their clientele on account of their professionalism, the “one-way Buddhists” [4.2.3.3] only had Buddhism as their philosopher’s stone or *cintā,maṇī* to draw their crowd of supporters. But their philosopher’s stone worked best with those of unquestioning faith. Understandably, even religious teachers and monastics had to be fed and supported. Those who were less confident in the Buddha Dharma were likely to be more nervous about their source of income and comfort, and as such, had to ensure the loyalty of their followers and audience.

We only need to ponder on the Buddha’s life to heal such insecurities. In renouncing the world, the buddha-to-be gives up every source of security and pleasure that the world can provide, to venture into the inner world all alone (this is *the only way*), not resting until he is sure that he has found full awakening. The buddha’s quest is that of neither accumulation nor affiliation of ideas or rituals, much less for worldly gains and joys, but for *less and less of attachment to the world* until, with the final letting-go, there is true freedom—like a monkey letting go of the banana in a coconut trap and so escaping from the trapper.

The Buddha’s teaching is about liberation, not affiliation. The early teachings and the contemplative training entail *personal effort* in spiritual practice, of not relegating our religiosity or spirituality into the hands of another, but taking charge of our lives, being accountable for our actions. This entails our sustained efforts in moral discipline for the sake of mental cultivation leading to liberating wisdom. In other words, we need to emulate the example of the bodhisattva and envision the buddha.

4.3 THE BUDDHA’S BIRTH AND YOUTH

4.3.1 The Buddha’s birth. The Mahā’pādāna Sutta (D 14) and the Acchariyābbhuta,dhamma Sutta (M 12) relate other events during the Bodhisattva’s time in his mother’s womb and thereafter. It is said (DA 2:437) that the Bodhisattva is born when his mother is in the last third of her middle age, so that the birth is easy for both mother and child. Various miracles attend the Bodhisattva’s birth. [1.2]

The Commentaries elaborate and expand on these miracles only mentioned briefly in the Suttas. As soon as the Bodhisattva is born, he stands majestically on his feet, sheltered by a white parasol, then he

¹¹⁵ On “the ‘not-Buddhist’ buddhists,” see (Tathāgata) Acchariyā S 1 (A 4.127/2:130 f), SD 36.15 (3.4.3.2).

¹¹⁶ D 22.1b/2:290 @ SD 13.2; but see SD 13.1(3.2).

takes seven steady strides to the north, stands and surveys the four quarters and makes the lion-roar, “Foremost am I of the world! Eldest am I of the world! Supreme am I of the world! This is the last birth, there no more rebirth here (for me)!” (*aggo ’ham asmi lokassa, jeṭṭho ’ham asmi lokassa, seṭṭho ’ham asmi lokassa, ayam antimā jāti, n ’atthi dāni punabbhavo*, D 2:15).

There is no mention of any virgin birth, though the birth might seem to be *parthenogenetic*¹¹⁷ (Miln 123). It is traditionally said that the Buddha’s mother, Mahā Māyā, gives birth to him in a standing position, while grasping sal-tree branch. The child is said to have been delivered “from her right side,” which might suggest that she is given a caesarean section.¹¹⁸ Medicine and surgery were relatively advanced in the buddha’s time.¹¹⁹ The Vinaya, for example, has accounts of allowances for such invasive operations,¹²⁰ and various ancient Indian treatises mention such procedures.¹²¹ The ancient Indian physician Śuśruta (before 800 BCE) was recorded to have performed cataract surgery,¹²² and Jīvaka, the well known physician of the Buddha’s time, is said to have done numerous operations.¹²³

4.3.2 The myths and their meanings. Numerous superhuman feats and features are attributed to the child Gotama, and many miraculous events linked with him. Such stories and myths are interesting in themselves and in relation to our lives. However, we will discuss these in some detail elsewhere.¹²⁴ We shall only briefly look at some key stories here in connection with the buddha as a myth.

The Commentators, besides elaborating on the miraculous accounts of the Bodhisattva given in the suttas, began to explain the significance of the miracles attending his birth, such as these:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| • standing on the earth | means the attaining of the four iddhi-pādas; |
| • facing north | refers to his conversion of multitudes; |
| • the seven strides | are the seven awakening-factors (<i>satta bojjhaṅga</i>); |
| • the parasol | is the shade of liberation; |
| • looking around | refers to unveiled wisdom; |
| • his fearlessness | is the unstoppable turning of the Dharma wheel; |
| • declaring his the last birth | is his impending arhathood. (DA 2:439) |

However, it is said that the monastic authorities of the Mahāvihāra in Sri Lanka do not seem to agree on some details. For example, what happened when the Bodhisattva took his seven strides northwards?

¹¹⁷ The term *parthenogenesis* lit means “virgin birth,” but biologically means asexual reproduction, which can occur naturally in some invertebrates (such as water fleas, aphids, nematodes, some bees, some Phasmida (such as stick insects), some scorpion species, and parasitic wasps) and some vertebrates (eg some reptiles, fish, and very rarely birds and sharks). Parthenogenesis has been induced artificially in fish and amphibians. Some scientific experiments using human cells seem to suggest the possibility of parthenogenesis, but are still inconclusive. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parthenogenesis>.

¹¹⁸ Bindusāra (born c320 BCE, r 298-272 BCE), second Maurya emperor was recorded to have been surgically removed from her mother who died from accidental poisoning. Julius Caesar prob was not born in this manner although this delivery method was attr to him. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarean_section.

¹¹⁹ Mahā Māyā gives birth to the Buddha in a forest (*araññā*) halfway between Kapila, vatthu and Deva, dāha. The remoteness of this place prob prevented proper medical help from arriving in time to help her.

¹²⁰ A whole section, *Bhesajja Khandhaka*, of the Mahā Vagga (ch 6) in the Vinaya Piṭaka, discusses monastic medicine (V 1:199-252); also V 1:272-274. See Ency Bsm: Bhesajja (3:27-34).

¹²¹ Two ancient medical texts are important, viz, Śuśruta Saṁhita (3rd-4th cent CE, which describe many surgical instruments) and Caraka Saṁhita (3rd-2nd cent BCE, on internal medicine). Such texts describe herniotomy, abscess draining, rhinoplasty, and tourniquet methd.

¹²² Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna, *Śuśruta Saṁhita*, vol 1: Sūtrasthānam (Calcutta: Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna 1907: iv; Stephen Lock et al, *The Oxford Illustrated Companion to Medicine*. NY, 2001: 420.

¹²³ One of Jīvaka’s numerous invasive operations was a brain surgery on a patient who complained of severe headaches. Jīvaka healed king Bimbisāra of a fistula (V 1:272 f) and operated on his brain, removed a worm (*pāṇaka*) from his skull, and closed the suture. His patient recovered (V 1:274). See Ency Bsm: Surgery.

¹²⁴ See **The miraculous life of the Buddha**, SD 52.1.

Did he walk on the earth or travel through the air? Did people see him go? Was he clothed? Did he look like an infant or an adult?

The Sinhala monk, Tipiṭaka Culābhaya, it is said, while teaching in the Loha, pāsāda (the Metal Palace), settled the question by suggesting a compromise, that is, the Bodhisattva walked on the ground, but onlookers perceived that he was travelling through the air; he was naked, but onlookers perceived that he was gaily dressed; he was an infant, but looked sixteen years old; and after his lion-roar, reverted to infancy! (DA 2:442)

4.3.3 The Buddha's person. After his birth, the Bodhisattva is presented to the soothsayers for their forecasts. They again declare that he would take only one of the two courses, that of the world-monarch or the world teacher. Examining the child's body, they discover the thirty-two marks of the great man (*mahā, purisa*),¹²⁵ along with the 80 lesser marks (*asīti anuvyañjana*), such as finger-nails that are copper coloured, soft, long, rounded; hair that is dark, glossy, unbroken, soft, and fragrant; and feet and palms bearing the signs of the hair-curl (*srīvatsa*), the tetragammadion (*svastika*), the labyrinthine grammadion (*nandyāvarta*) and a *vardhamāna*.¹²⁶

The Brahm'āyu Sutta (M 2:137 f) gives other details about Gotama, which apparently apply to all buddhas. Thus it is said that, when walking, he always starts with the right foot, his steps are neither too long nor too short, only his lower limbs move. When he gazes on anything, he turns right fully around to do so ("the elephant look," *nāga, vilokana*). When entering a house, he never bends his body (cf DhA 2:136). When sitting down and accepting water to wash his bowl, eating, washing his hands after eating, or giving thanks, he sits in a most appropriate and dignified manner.

When teaching, it is said, the Buddha neither flatters nor denounces his audience but merely instructs them, rousing, enlightening and heartening them (M 2:139). His voice possesses 8 qualities: it is frank, clear, melodious, pleasant, full, carrying, deep and resonant; it does not travel beyond his audience.¹²⁷

The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 9) says that the Buddha appears before the 8 assemblies, that is, those of kshatriyas, of brahmins, of householders, of recluses, of the Cātum, mahā, rājika devas, of the Tāva, timśa devas, of Māras, and of Brahmās, looking and speaking just like them, and teaches them the Dharma, inspiring them. However, on account of this transformation, they do not realize that he is the Buddha.¹²⁸ This is clearly a skillful means of the Buddha, which can also be taken as suggesting that, if the occasion merits it, the Dharma should be presented in a *contextual* manner that would appeal to the audience. [5.7]

4.4 EVALUATION

4.4.1 The early texts often record that the Buddha and the great saints, on account of their awakening, present themselves with a demeanour of blissful calm. The newly awakened Buddha, on his way to the Deer Park to meet the 5 monks, for example, inspired the naked wanderer, **Upaka**, to ask him about his spirituality. Lacking spirituality himself, Upaka, however, is unable to appreciate the Buddha's awakening, until later when his marriage fails!¹²⁹

4.4.2 The newly awakened **Assaji** (one of the first 5 monks), on the other hand, hesitates when the wanderer Sāriputta requests a teaching (probably fearful of getting into a debate with him). However,

¹²⁵ D 2:17, 19; M 2:136 f. On the Buddha's bodily marks of the great man, see **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7 (4.10); **On women's inabilities**, SD 29.1b (2.3n); **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30), SD 36.9 (3).

¹²⁶ DA 3:918,16; MA 2:8; UA 87,3, 105, 18; VvA 315,31; Miln 75,2; J 1:89,21, 444,5. On details of the lesser marks, see Lalv 106,11-107,14; see also J 1:12; Mvst 2 :43. See Ency Bsm: Mahāpurisa (6:467-470); Anuvyañjana (1:785); also Oleg Daniel Bendz, "The Buddhalakshana," [MA thesis] Dept of East Asian Studies, Univ of Toronto, 2010: https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/24537/5/Bendz_Oleg_D_201006_MA_thesis.pdf.

¹²⁷ For details concerning his voice, see DA 2:452 f; MA 2:771f.

¹²⁸ D 16.3.21-23/2:109 f @ SD 9; also in **Parisā S** (A 8.69/4:307 f) and nearly identical to a passage in **Maha Sīha, nāda S** (M 12.29/1:72), SD 49.1.

¹²⁹ V 1:8; M 1:171; J 1:81; DhA 4:71 f; cf Miln 235; UA 54; Kvu 289; Mvst 3:326: see **Why the Buddha hesitated**, SD 12.1(4) verse.

when Sāriputta politely insists, Assaji instructs him by way of a famous verse on conditionality,¹³⁰ and Sāriputta (and later Moggallāna) attains streamwinning.¹³¹

4.4.3 Later accounts of the Buddha, as it were, often stood him on his head, such as depicting him as putting on airs to appear saintly or at least dignified. However, we might be less critical if we remind ourselves that the later story-tellers were presenting the buddha of their myths. The buddha they projected, in other words, served as a role model for their monastic, religious or sectarian culture. Monastics in large organized monasteries in an urbanized society must appear to be socially (and politically) correct so as to attract support and patronage, especially from the wealthy and the powerful.

Furthermore, sutta teachings and meditation would not appeal to an urbanized and materialist audience. They needed to be awe-inspired with legends of a larger-than-life buddha, and to be inspired by an almost mercantile mechanics of karma, that good reaps more good, as the stories of **the Vimāna, vatthu**¹³² suggest. And to ensure that the worldly devotees are not out of line, they are given veiled warnings of impending bad karma that bring terrible subhuman births, as suggested by **the Peta, vatthu**.¹³³ And so we have the rise of a catholic Buddhism, as was the case of the Mahā, vihāra of Sri Lanka.¹³⁴

Today, in our cities, priests (we cannot call them monastics because of their moneyed and worldly life-style and professional priestcraft) are generally well dressed, with their designer robes, often made of good cloth. Their robes are often tweaked up, and some even keep their heads unshaven, as if to match their dress. The more these priests place greater priority and premium on titles, status and achievements, the more they lose their monastic look.¹³⁵ Only the wise may rightly read what is really in their dark hearts. There is a sutta prophecy that a time would come when they can only be identified by a yellow thread around their necks, with the wives and children around them! They are appropriately named “Yellownecks.”¹³⁶

¹³⁰ “What states that arise from causes, their causes the Tathagata has told. | And their ending, too: thus spoke the great asectic,” *Ye dhammā hetu-p, pabhavā tesam hetum tathāgato āha | tesañ ca yo nirodho evaṃ, vādī mahā, sama-no ’ti* || (Mv 1.13.5+10 @ V 1:40,28*+41,35* (VA 5:975) = Ap 1.146/1:25 (ApA 231) = Peṭk 10 = ThaA 3:95.

¹³¹ V 1:39-42; Ap 24; VA 965; MA 2:192, 346; AA 1:157; J 1:83, 85; DhA 1:91, 4:75.

¹³² **Vimāna, vatthu** consists of 83 stories in 7 chapters, describing the glory of the celestial abodes (*vimāna*) of those reborn as devas as a reward for merits done as erstwhile human beings. Like the Peta, vatthu, it is clearly a work intended for the laity, and is one of the latest texts to be added to the Pali Canon. See K R Norman 1983b:70 f.

¹³³ **Peta, vatthu** comprises 51 stories in 4 chapters, telling the stories of departed ones (*peta*) who are suffering because of the bad actions in previous births. Like the Vimāna, vatthu, it is clearly a late work intended for the laity. See K R Norman 1983b:71 f.

¹³⁴ The Mahā, vihāra (“Great Monastery”) was for many centuries the main seat of the ancestral branch for present-day Theravāda in Sri Lanka. Founded by king Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 BCE) in his capital, Anurādhapura, it was given to the missionaries from Asoka’s court. For centuries, it co-existed with the other two local sects, The Abhaya, giri and the Jetavana, that is, until the Abhaya, giri openly accepted the heretical Vaitulya Pītaka. The two communities remained separate until 1165, when a council at Anurādhapura reconciled them. When the capital was abandoned in the 13th century, the history of the Mahāvihāra came to an end. See Oxford Dict Bsm, sv.

¹³⁵ Here again, this statement should be understood psychologically as, eg, reflective of the defence mechanism of compensation or identification, not any kind of philistinism. Ideally, we should complete our academic training first, and then turn to the cloth. Otherwise, we could still be a good scholar as well as a serious contemplative, an arrangement where we would surely benefit many, acting as a bridge for students arrive at practical Buddhism wisdom-wise.

¹³⁶ *Kāsāva, kañṭha. Dakkhīṇa Vibhaṅga S* (M 142) says that they are “members of the religious lineage who are “yellow-necks,” immoral, of evil nature,” *gotrabhuno kāsāva, kañṭhā dussilā pāpa, dhammā* (M 142.8/3:256), SD 1.9. Comy says that these “members of the religious lineage” (*gotra, bhuno*) are “monks” only in name (M 3:256, 7 = Sāra, saṅgaha 25,9). They will go about with only a piece of yellow cloth around their necks or arms, and will support their wives and children by engaging in trade and farming, etc (MA 5:74 f). They are those who ritually don the saffron robe, and when they remove them, leave the saffron taints on their necks. On *kāsāva, kañṭha*, see also It 43 (ItA 177), 90; Dh 307a (Dh:P 113, Uv 1.9, *kāsāya, kañṭha*; DhA 3:478) qu at V 3:90 (VA 486); AA 1:90, 13+24, wr *kāsāva, khaṇḍa*; SnA 162,2, 164,23; Sadda, nīti 78,4, 78,1 *kañṭha, samaṇa*. Does this uncanny premonition refer to the laicized gurus and their followers who claim to be “neither ordained nor lay order members” in our own times?

4.4.4 Although early Buddhism is not a religion of the book, it has an ancient and comprehensive scripture that gives detailed and workable instructions in moral training (for body and speech) and mental cultivation, as the bases for insight wisdom leading to spiritual liberation. In other words, unlike the book-religions whose texts comprise dogmas and diktats that keep the faithful docile and affiliated, the early Buddhist texts are *guides to personal cultivation and spiritual awakening* that need not be updated, in a way, to be practised and internalized. The Buddha Dharma is viably updated and perpetuated when we close our eyes in joyful stillness, so that we can, with open eyes, look directly at the world for what it is and do what needs to be done to help and heal it.

5 The Buddha's wisdom and compassion

5.1 THE BUDDHA'S KNOWLEDGE AND POWERS

5.1.1 The Buddha's powers

5.1.1.1 The Buddha has the 10 powers (*dasa bala*) which consist of his perfect comprehension in ten fields of knowledge. These ten powers are briefly as follows, that is, he understands according to reality,

- (1) the possible and the impossible;
- (2) the results of past, present and future actions by way of possibilities and causes;
- (3) the ways leading to all karmic destinations;
- (4) the world with its numerous and various elements;
- (5) the different inclinations of beings;
- (6) the dispositions of the faculties in beings;
- (7) the defilement, the cleansing, and the emergence of dhyanas, liberations, concentrations and attainments;
- (8) the recollection of manifold past lives in their various aspects;
- (9) the divine eye, with which he sees how beings fare according to their karma; and
- (10) self-realization through direct knowledge, dwelling here and now in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are influx-free with the destruction of the influxes.

(M 12,9-21/1:69-71, SD 49.1; S 12.21/2:27 f; A 10.21/5:32-36)

Others who are spiritually developed may also have such powers, but they are inferior to those of the Buddha. The ability of retrocognition (the recollection of manifold past lives in their various aspects), for example, is found in the 6 kinds of purified beings, in the ascending order thus: in the sectarian (*titthiya*) practitioners, the ordinary recluses (*pakati,sāvaka*), the great disciples (*mahā,sāvaka*), the foremost disciples (*agga,sāvaka*), the individual buddhas (*pacceka buddha*) and the buddhas. (Vism 411)

5.1.1.2 The Buddha is **omniscient**, not in the sense that he knows everything all the time (which is impossible for anyone, divine or human), but that he can know anything any time should he so desire¹³⁷ [2.2]. His knowledge (*ñāṇa*) is one of the four immeasurables. Like his mind, his body, too, cannot be measured for purposes of comparison with other bodies (MA 2:790).

5.1.1.3 According to **the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11), he is recorded as being able to convert others in any of three ways:

- (1) by exhibition of miraculous powers (*iddhi,pātihāriya*),
- (2) by reading their thoughts (*ādesanā,pātihāriya*), or
- (3) by teaching them what is beneficial to them according to their character and temperament (*anusāsani,pātihāriya*). (D 11,3-8/1:212-214), **SD 1.7**

The greatest of miracles, the Buddha declares, is that of “instruction,” that is, the third method, and it is also the one he often uses, and exhorts us to do the same (BA 81). Moreover, the suttas often present the Buddha as disapproving of the first two methods as “display” (*pāṭihāriya*).

5.1.1.4 Every buddha holds a “great gathering” (*mahā,samaya*), but only a buddha is capable of teaching a series of discourses to suit the different temperaments of such a great congregation (D 2:255;

¹³⁷ Nm 178,179; NmA 223; SnA 1:18.

DA 2:682f). The Buddha's rivals sometimes pejoratively claim that he possesses the "magic of conversion" (*āvattanī, māyā*). While it is true that the Buddha is a wise, engaging and charismatic teacher, there are occasions when he has difficulties even with his own monks, who would not listen to him. A well known case is that of the Kosambī monks.¹³⁸

There are certain individuals (human and non-human), whom only the Buddha can convert, that is, those who have an affinity with him (*buddha, veneyya*) (SnA 1:331). Some are pleased by his looks (such as Vakkalī), others by his voice (such as the frog, Maṇḍuka), yet others by his austerities, such as his donning ascetic robes. Those whose see him in terms of moral goodness, reflect that he is without a peer (DhA 3:113 f).

5.1.1.5 In the Canon, too, we have texts that list the Buddha's special qualities. For example, a Buddha is said to possess the fourfold intrepidity (*vesāraja*, M 1:71 f),¹³⁹ the 18 exceptional states (*āvenika, dhammā*),¹⁴⁰ and the 16 unsurpassables (*anuttariyas*) listed by Sāriputta in the **Sampasādāniya Sutta** (D 28).¹⁴¹

5.1.2 Love mode, power mode

5.1.2.1 While the Buddha forbids only public display of miracles, even in converting others, the Commentaries and later works, however, often depict the Buddha as openly displaying such powers. If we see the Buddha in the early suttas as being consistently in the "love mode," he is frequently depicted in later stories as being in the "power mode." **The "love mode"** means "I will try to reach out to you in every way possible to warm and win your heart, so that you will realize the Dharma for yourself." **The "power mode"** is that "I will use what it takes to make Buddhism attractive to you so that you are affiliated and loyal to me with your support and patronage."

5.1.2.2 Buddha Dharma can only be in *the love mode*, if we are to help and heal ourselves and other beings. (The power mode, on the other hand, is to help *ourselves* to others.) This is unconditional love and it begins within us, inspired by the universality of pain and suffering: just as we hate pain and fear suffering, so do others, too. This is the golden rule.¹⁴² This is to see others in ourselves, and see ourselves in others. This is the crux of moral training: we keep the precepts out of unconditional self-acceptance and great compassion for others.¹⁴³

5.1.2.3 Those who regularly break the precepts and do bad things, love neither themselves nor others. Their **power-mode** blinds them to what goodness really is and skews their minds to see people as objects to be measured and counted, and wealth as something to be accumulated rather than used, that is, for bringing happiness and healing to the greatest number of beings.

When we are overwhelmed in a power mode, we work only with our *minds*, planning, conceiving, thinking, so that we lose our *hearts*, and become unfeeling, unhappy, insatiate. Our power mode makes us acquisitive, fired by the fever to count and collect things, as if this is possible, so that it prevents us from ever thinking of letting go of anything, not even our thoughts. If we are unable to free our minds, we would not be able to meditate, or even to be simply mindful.

5.1.2.4 Our lives is basically what we choose to pay attention to. When we are in a power mode, we habitually live in the past, driven by past desires. For, all desires are running after what we are used to in the past, or what we imagine could be in our hands in time to come. And what we think we have, we

¹³⁸ **Kosambaka Khandhaka** (Mv 10.1-5 = V 1:337-357; **Pārileyya S**, S 22.81/3:94 @ SD 6.1 (qv) & SA 2:304 ff ; **Nāga S**, U 4.5/41 f; **Kosambī J**, J 428/3:486-490 (cf **Dīghitī Kosala J**, J 371/3:211-213; **Kosambaka Vatthu**, DhA 1.5/1:53-66).

¹³⁹ *Vesāraja*. On its antonym, *sāraja*, see **Sāraja S** (A 5.1012/3:127), SD 28.9a(3) & **Piṇḍolya S** (S 22.80/3:91-94), SD 28.9a(3). On the Buddha's 4 intrepidities, see **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** (M 12.22-28/1:71 f), SD 49.1.

¹⁴⁰ Or, *āvenika buddha, dhamma*, UA 87,7 = VvA 213,13. Described at Lalv 183, 343. Buddhaghosa also gives a list of 18 "Buddha qualities" (*buddha, dhammā*), but they refer to the absence of misdeeds (*duccarita*), ie, the purity of action in the Buddha's case (DA 3:994).

¹⁴¹ D 28/3:99-116 @ SD 14.14.

¹⁴² On the golden rule, see **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:232) + SD 1.5(1).

¹⁴³ This is lovingkindness (*mettā*): see **Mettā Bhāvanā S** (It 1.3.7/19-21) + SD 30.7(1.2)

tightly grasp so that it takes the shape our hands. Yet, we are unable to enjoy what we cling to—for they lie breathless in our suffocating grasp—so we are forced to continue to seek for more of the like.

Drowned in the power mode, we become the living dead. We are dead to others and the world, even to ourselves. So we keep looking for a “life,” as it were; but *life must be lived*, not lorded over or collected. When we are power-moded, we depend on others to give us that power. For, power to us means only power over others, so we think. The reality is that *our existence and the existence of others are interdependent*. We have no life we can call our own. The moment we say “I,” it is gone: we become ever anew in ever moving moments. We can exist only in change and interbeing. We need to understand to be truly free.

5.1.2.5 Only in letting go of the power mode, can we would warm up into the **love mode**. When we are really in love with ourselves as we are in love with others, we are empowered to truly live. The love mode empowers us to let go of the past and let the future be. For the past is gone; the future never comes. To love is to feel our own presence and the presence of others, and to celebrate it in our thoughts, our words and our actions.

All that we are, all that we can be, are in the present moment. This present moment is an open window through which we not only see all the goodness we are capable of, but also act on them. Live the present well, then our past becomes valuable lessons and the future a living reward.

5.1.2.6 One moment, a thought arises, the next it ceases. Thoughts momentarily come and go. “Worry” is when we try to hold on to or to freeze what has to move on. We are still an on-going process.¹⁴⁴ We must not hold our breaths, not for too long anyway. We live by letting go of every breath so that the next may come. When the final breath comes in its rightful time, we have fully breathed this life. Our debt to life is paid, as it were, so that we are truly at peace, like Sāriputta (Tha 1002 f).¹⁴⁵ This is called nirvana.

5.2 THE BUDDHA’S COMPASSION AND CONCERN

5.2.1 The Buddha’s compassion is legendary. Whenever a monk is in some emotional difficulty, the Buddha speaks to him with gentle reassuring words, such as in the following cases:

- **Thulla Tissa**. In the **(Thīna,middha) Tissa Sutta** (S 22.84), the Buddha reassures the monk Tissa who is dissatisfied with the holy life on account of his difficulties with sloth and torpor. At the end of his instructions, the Buddha reassured him by saying, “Rejoice, Tissa! Rejoice, Tissa! Here I am with advice; here I am with support; here I am with instruction!” (S 22.84/3:106-109), **SD** 32.12.
- **Nanda**. In the **Nanda Sutta** (U 3.2), the Buddha takes a lovesick young monk to see the heavenly nymphs of Tāvātīmsa, and declares, “Rejoice, Nanda! Rejoice, Nanda! I guarantee that you will obtain 500 dove-footed celestial nymphs!” (U 3.2/23,6), **SD** 43.7.
- **Vakkali**. The **Vakkali Sutta** (DhA 25.11) records how a youth, physically attracted to the Buddha, becomes a monk so that he is able to gaze on him. When the Buddha leaves for the rains-retreat without him, he is devastated and attempts suicide. The Buddha appears to him in a hologram and consoles him, “Come, Vakkali! Fear not, look at the Tathāgata! I will lift you up like one lifting an elephant sunk in the mire.” (DhA 25.11/4:118 f), **SD** 8.8.

5.2.2 However, the Buddha does not suffer monastics who stubbornly choose to wallow in their ignorance and foolishness, endangering themselves and others with their wrong views. The **Alaggadūpama Sutta** (M 27) records how the Buddha reprimands the monk Ariṭṭha, who holds the wrong view that sexual pleasure is not a stumbling-block to a monk’s spiritual life, chiding him, “O hollow man, to whom have you ever known me to teach the Dharma in that way? O hollow man, have I not spoken in many ways regarding obstructions and how they obstruct those who indulge in them?”¹⁴⁶

Similarly, in the **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38), when the monk Sāti clings to *the wrong view* that it is the same consciousness that runs through our different lives (as an unchanging entity), even after

¹⁴⁴ See Piya Tan, Reflections: “Man, the unfinished,” 2011: <http://dharmafarer.org>.

¹⁴⁵ “I delight not in death, nor do I delight in life; | I shall cast aside this body fully aware and mindful. || I delight not in death, nor do I delight in life; | I await my time as a servant his wages.” (Tha 1002 f)

¹⁴⁶ M 22,6/1:132 @ SD 31.3.

the Buddha has clarified this controversy, he chides him, saying: “Misguided one [You hollow man],¹⁴⁷ to whom have you ever known me to have taught the Dharma in that way? Misguided one, have I not stated in many ways that consciousness is dependently arisen,¹⁴⁸ that without a condition there is no arising of consciousness? But you, misguided one, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured¹⁴⁹ yourself, and stored up much demerit—for, this will bring you harm and suffering for a long time.”¹⁵⁰

5.2.3 The most dramatic case where Buddha shows his strong disapproval of monkish misconduct is found in **the Cātumā Sutta** (M 67), where the Buddha dismisses a group of noisy monks led by Sāriputta. Only after the intercession of the Sakyas and of Brahmā himself, it is said, that the Buddha “forgives” them and welcomes them back to the monastery.¹⁵¹

The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) recounts how the Buddha, unable to discipline his own erstwhile charioteer Channa while he is a monk, just before his parinirvana imposes the “supreme penalty” (*brahma,daṇḍa*), that is, a total boycott of a monk who is scurrilous (*mukhara*) and uncivil to other monks.¹⁵² The Saṃyutta Commentary says that, after being boycotted by the sangha, Channa experiences samvega (spiritual urgency) so that he finally directs all his efforts towards spiritual training and attains breakthrough (SA 2:317 f), as reported in **the (Dvi,lakkhaṇa) Channa Sutta** (S 22.90).¹⁵³ Here we see how the Buddha’s wisdom and compassion reaches out to Channa even posthumously through the Dharma and the Sangha!

The lesson of such incidents is clear: we tend to take for granted what are truly precious in our lives—that is, the Dharma—and if we do not internalize it, we become hollow beings, shells of our past, bereft of a purposeful life. Since the Buddha places the Dharma above himself,¹⁵⁴ even in his absence or death, the Dharma still works in us, for us. He who sees the Buddha, see the Dharma; he who sees the Dharma, sees the Buddha.¹⁵⁵

5.3 THE BUDDHA’S AWAKENING AND MISSION

5.3.1 The typical career of a buddha is illustrated in the life of Gotama. He sees the 4 signs—an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a recluse—and shaken with samvega,¹⁵⁶ renounces the world. At this crucial moment, news of his son’s birth comes to him, but his mind is already set on renouncing the world. This, the Commentary explains, is to ensure that he is seen to be a normal “feeling” human being, struggling with his values and seeking meaning in his life, and that he is not mistaken for something else (like a god or divine messenger) (DA 2:422). In fact, the “divine messengers” (*deva,dūta*) have already appeared to him as the four sights mentioned.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁷ *Mogha,purisa*, lit “empty person.” I’ve followed a safe well-tested translation here. However, while *mogha* evokes more deeply a spiritual lack, “misguided” connotes more of psychosocial errancy. Cf TS Eliot’s “Hollow Men” (where “empty men” is also mentioned) which fully brings out the meaning here but lacks emotional connective for those unfamiliar with the poem.

¹⁴⁸ “Consciousness is dependently arisen,” *paṭicca,samuppannaṃ viññāṇaṃ*. Cf **Mahā Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 28): “These five aggregates of clinging are dependently arisen.” (M 28.28/1:191), SD 3.13.

¹⁴⁹ “Injured,” *khanasi*, 2nd p sg of *khaṇati*: (1) hurts, injures; impairs (V 2:26 = M 1:132; D 1:86; S 1:27; A 1:89, 3:350; Tha 1173); (2) digs; digs up excavates (V 3:48, 76, 4:32; M 2:51; S 1:127; A 4:159; Dh 247, 337; U 15). There is a wordplay here: Sāti harms himself with wrong view, and also dig up his wholesome roots.

¹⁵⁰ M 38,5/1:258= SD 7.10.

¹⁵¹ M 67/1:456-462 @ SD 34.7.

¹⁵² DhA 2:111 f; V 2:290-292; VA 7:1402 (Comy on the Parivāra).

¹⁵³ S 22.90/3:132-135), SD 56.5

¹⁵⁴ See **Gārava S** (S 6.2/1:138-140), SD 12.3.

¹⁵⁵ In **Vakkali S** (S 22.87), the Buddha declares, “Vakkali, one who sees the Dharma sees me; one who sees me, sees the Dharma” (*yo kho Vakkali dhammaṃ passati so maṃ passati; yo maṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati*) (S 22.-87,13/3:120), SD 8.8. Cf **Saṅghāṭi,kappa S** (It 92/3.5.3/90-92), SD 24.10a. See Harvey 1995a:231-234.

¹⁵⁶ Samvega (*samvega*) is a sense of spiritual urgency, of being shocked and disillusioned by realizing that something vitally significant to us is not what we had made it to be. It is a sort of “the dark night of the heart” that seeks the light: see **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16), SD 9 (7f).

¹⁵⁷ On the divine messengers, see **Deva,dūta S** (M 130/3:178-187), SD 2.23.

Some buddhas see all the 4 signs on the same day, but others, like Vipassī, after long intervals (DA 2:457). On the night before the awakening, the Bodhisattva has 5 dreams, portending his impending awakening and greatness (A 3:240). The 5 dreams (along with its portents) are summarized as follows:

- (1) The world appears as a great couch, and the Himalayas as a pillow. The Bodhisattva lies down on it with his left hand in the eastern ocean, his right in the western, and his feet in the southern. (Full awakening will be attained by him.)
- (2) The *tiriyā* plant rises from his hand and touches the sky. (The noble eightfold path.)
- (3) White worms with black heads crawl up as far as his knees and cover them. (The white-robe lay disciples.)
- (4) Four birds of different colours come from the four quarters, and falling at his feet turn fully white. (Those renouncing the world, give up the four classes to realize full liberation, nirvana.)
- (5) He walks on a mountain of dung without being soiled by it. (He uses the requisites without any attachment.) (A 5.196/3:240), SD 63.13; Mvst 2:136 f)¹⁵⁸

5.3.2 After the awakening, the Buddha does not teach until he is invited to do so by Mahā Brahmā—so that the world (that is, the ancient Indians and God-believers in general) might respect the Buddha and be amenable to his Dharma (DA 2:467). A buddha generally flies through the air from the Bodhi tree to the Deer Park at Isipatana to give his first discourse, but Gotama goes on foot so that he will meet the naked wanderer Upaka on the way (DA 2:471).

One of the key reasons that the Buddha’s teaching became strongly established during the Buddha’s own life-time is that he is unrelenting in his efforts to teach the Dharma wherever he goes and to whom-ever he meets. Outside of three months of the rains, the Buddha spends his time wandering from place to place, teaching the Dharma, inspiring others to goodness and happiness. This **peregrination** or Dharma tour (*cārika*) is of two kinds, the quick (*turita*) and the leisurely (*aturita*).

The first, the quick tour (*turita cārika*), is a short journey, taken for the benefit of a particular ready individual (*bhabba puggala*) (SnA 440). Thus, the Buddha travels three gavutas (*gāvuta*)¹⁵⁹ to meet Mahā Kassapa,¹⁶⁰ thirty leagues (*yojana*) to see Ālavaka,¹⁶¹ and Aṅgulimāla,¹⁶² forty five leagues to see Pukkusaṭi,¹⁶³ and 700 leagues to meet the herdsman Dhaniya.¹⁶⁴ The second, the slow tour (*aturita cārika*), is a leisurely peregrination, often in stages and accompanied by a large assembly of monks, when the Buddha teaches and counsels those he meets along the way.

The range of a buddha’s peregrination varies from year to year. Sometimes, he would tour the “great circle” (*mahā,maṇḍala*) of 900 leagues, sometimes the “middle circle” (*majjhima,maṇḍala*) of 600 leagues, sometimes only the “inner circle” (*anto,maṇḍala*) of 300 leagues. A tour of the great circle takes up to nine months (that is, the dry months of the year), that of the middle circle eight, and that of the inner circle from one to four months. Details of such peregrinations and their reasons are given at length in the Commentaries (DA 1:240-243). When the Buddha is unable to go on a journey himself, he sends his chief disciples (SnA 2:474). The Buddha announces his intention of undertaking a journey two weeks before he

¹⁵⁸ The Bodhisattva’s dreams: see **Mahā Supina S** (A 5.196/3:240), SD 63.13; Mvst 2:136 f. See also **The miraculous life of the Buddha**, SD 52.1.

¹⁵⁹ A *gāvuta* is about 3 km; 4 gavutas make a *yojana*, which is about 7 mi or 11.25 km (DhA 2:13).

¹⁶⁰ J 4:180. On his name, see UA 60. On his being the foremost of monks professing ascetic practice, see A 1:23; AA 1:161 ff.

¹⁶¹ J 4:180; SA 1:321 f.

¹⁶² The Buddha first meets Aṅgulimāla in the 20th year of the Buddha’s ministry. M 86/2 :97-105 @ SD 5.11; MA 3:304-319; J 4 :180; DhA 3:169 f; ThaA 54-64. The distance of 30 *yojana* is about 338 km = 210 mi.

¹⁶³ See **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140). Pukkusaṭi, it is said, travels from Takka,silā (in Gandhāra, in what is today Taxila, Pakistan), travelling about 2150 km (1335 mi) to Sāvattihī (where the Buddha is), bypassing it going on to Rājā,gaha, some 504 km (313 mi) further, thinking the Buddha is there. While resting en route, the Buddha meets him in a potter’s hut. He only recognizes the Buddha midway through his teaching (M 140/3:237-247), SD 4.17.

¹⁶⁴ SnA 440. Their meeting and poetical “duel” is recorded in **Dhaniya S** (Sn 1.2/18-34/3-6).

starts, so that the monks may get ready (DhA 2:167). The area traversed by the Buddha is known as the “middle country” (*majjhima,desa*), that is, the middle Gangetic plain, which is about the size of Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia.

5.4 THE BUDDHA’S TEACHING AND DISPENSATION

5.4.1 The Buddha permits his audience to ask what they will. This is called “the omniscient one’s invitation” (*sabbaññu pavāranā*), and only a buddha is capable of keeping to this promise to answer any question (SnA 1:229) [2.2]. Though the Buddha’s teaching is never really lost on the listener, he sometimes teaches knowing that it will be of no immediate benefit, such as **the Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 25)¹⁶⁵ and **the Kandaraka Sutta** (M 51)¹⁶⁶ [5.5].

5.4.2 It is said that, in the Buddha’s time, wherever a monk dwells, even in a remote area, he would always have ready a special seat for the Buddha, should he come by for a visit (DA 1:48). Sometimes, the Buddha sends a beam of radiance from his fragrant cell, and appears as a hologram before a monk engaged in meditation to instruct and encourage him. Stanzas given on such occasions are called “light verses” (*obhāsa,gāthā*).¹⁶⁷

5.4.3 Every buddha founds a monastic order (of monks and nuns), and the first “monastic code verse” (*pātimokkh’uddesa gāthā*) of every buddha is the same (DA 2:479) [3.3.2(16)]. The aim of the Buddha’s instruction is always aimed at bringing the listener to arhathood (DA 3:732). To perpetuate his teaching for a long time to come, the Buddha establishes the fourfold assembly (*parisa*) of monk disciples, nun disciples, laymen disciples and laywomen disciples

who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, bearers of the Dharma, trained in accordance with the Dharma, correctly trained and walking the path of the Dharma, who will pass on what they have gained from their own Teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear; until they shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma in all its wonder. (D 16,3.35/2:112 f), SD 9

5.4.4 It is on account of the Buddha’s diligence and genius that we have his timeless teachings with us even to this day. He also has a penchant for skilful “head-hunting,” that is, he wisely chooses those whom he knows would be able to keep the dispensation going. In this connection, it is said, that the Buddha exchanges his robes with the newly converted Mahā Kassapa, as recorded in **the Cīvara Sutta** (S 16.11). The Buddha does this determining that he would make a forest-monk of the elder.¹⁶⁸

The Sutta’s commentary adds that, by this action, the Buddha wishes to appoint Mahā Kassapa to his own position.¹⁶⁹ This view, however, is problematic as the Buddha has never regarded himself as the “leader” of any “order,” and clearly impresses this on Ānanda when, as recorded in **the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), he questions the Buddha regarding who “will take care” (*pariharissatī*) of the sangha.¹⁷⁰ Mahā Kassapa, according to the Theravada, went on to convene the first council three months after the Buddha’s passing to recite, that is, formally put together, the Buddha’s teachings known to them for the benefit of posterity.

¹⁶⁵ The wanderer Nigrodha and the assembly of wanderers, although convinced by the Buddha’s compassion and teaching, neither join the order, nor show their faith in the Dharma, as they are blinded by Māra (D 25,24/3:56), SD 1.4.

¹⁶⁶ The Buddha introduces his teaching on the 4 kinds of persons (the self-tormentor, the other-tormentor, the all-tormentor, and the non-tormentor). When asked, Pessa (a lay follower) declares that he rejects the first three and accept only the last, and then takes leave to return to his duties. If he had stayed on briefly to hear the rest of the discourse, he would have attained some level of sainthood (M 51,7.1/1:342), SD 32.9.

¹⁶⁷ VA 4:802; MA 2:137; AA 1:44, 366, 380; SnA 1:16-19, 265; DhA 1:282; ThaA 1:218, 2:242; ThīA 12, 21, 176; PmA 3:658.

¹⁶⁸ S 16.11/2:221 @ SD 77.5.

¹⁶⁹ *Theraṃ attano thāne thapetu.kāmatāya* (SA 2:199).

¹⁷⁰ **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.25.2b/2:100), SD 9. **Cātumā S** (M 67,12-13/1:459), SD 34.7.

5.5 SIGNIFICANCE. The commentarial remark on the Buddha’s appointing Mahā Kassapa as his successor is clearly the view of the **Mahāvihārā** at Anurādhapura, Sri Lanka, where the Commentary was composed. Such an idea endorses a centralized political leadership of the monastic order, such as we now have in Thailand. This however is a later development in response to the political needs of the times.

This tale of empowerment was developed by the **Chan** tradition of China into the apocryphal story of “Dharma transmission.” Since the Chan did not rely on textual authority, they had to turn to the Chinese notion of ancestral lineage for authentication. In the Chan apocryphal story, Shakyamuni, acknowledging Kaśyapa’s smile upon presenting a flower to the assembly, is made to say: “I possess the treasury of the true Dharma-eye, the wondrous mind of nirvana. I entrust it to Mahā Kaśyapa.” This “treasury of the true Dharma-eye” (*zhèngfǎyǎn zàng* 正法眼藏),¹⁷¹ the essence of Shakyamuni’s teaching, was soon linked to the expression, “a special transmission outside the scriptures.” In fact, by the Sòng dynasty, the expression *the treasury of the true Dharma-eye*

became a catchword of Ch’an ideology, but it no longer referred to the tripiṭaka. It signified, rather, a special “collection” (*piṭaka; tsang*) [*zàng* 藏] that comprised no texts at all but simply the “eye” or formless essence of the dharma—the Buddha-mind or enlightenment itself. It was also used to refer to the sayings of Ch’an patriarchs, especially when collected and used as *kung-an*.
(T Griffith Foulk 1999:230 & n19)¹⁷²

The flower story was first mentioned in Chán transmission records in the *Tiānshèng guǎngdēng lù* 天聖廣燈錄,¹⁷³ understandably a key text that established Sòng Chán identity in terms of “a special transmission outside the scriptures.”¹⁷⁴

In later sectarian Buddhism, we see how living *sutta* becomes transmitted *dogma*; a dynamic *event* in the Buddha’s teaching, illustrating his wisdom and compassion jells into pious *spin* and religious orthodoxy. For a religious system to be truly self-healing and other-helping, it must first be true to itself. If we value religious ancestry, then the foremost place must be given to the very first of our ancestors, Shakyamuni, so that we stop killing him whenever we meet him on the road. Our ultimate *gōng’àn* is this: What is Shakyamuni without Zen? We return to the Buddha.

5.6 THE BUDDHA’S DAY.

5.6.1 The Buddha’s daily routine. The Buddha’s day, according to the Commentaries, is divided into five periods (two day *periods* and three night *watches*),¹⁷⁵ during each of which the Buddha performs his distinct duties.¹⁷⁶ He rises early, and having attended to his toilet, sits in solitude until it is time for the alms-round. He then puts on his outer robe and goes for alms, sometimes alone, sometimes with a large following of monks. When he wishes to go alone, he keeps the door of his cell shut, which is understood by the monks. (SnA 271)

¹⁷¹ This is a tt; cf 5.1.3.2 where it is the title of Dahui Zonggao’s only work.

¹⁷² T Griffith Foulk, “Sung controversies in concerning the ‘Seperate transmission’ of Ch’an,” in Gregory & Getz (eds) *Buddhism in the Sung*, 1999:220-294.

¹⁷³ Compiled by Lǐ Zūnxù 李遵勗 (988-1038)—the son-in-law of emperor Tàizōng 太宗 (r 976-998), brother-in-law of the emperor Zhēnzōng 真宗 (r 998-1023), and elder relative of the emperor Rénzōng 仁宗 (r 1023-1064)—so that even the text bore the reign title, *Tiānshèng* 天聖, and the emperor himself contributed a preface: see Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers and Literati*, 2006b:186-188.

¹⁷⁴ See esp Albert Welter, “Mahākāśyapa’s smile: Silent transmission and the Kung-an (Kōan) tradition,” in S Heine & D S Wright (edd), *The Kōan: Texts and contexts in Zen Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2000:75-109 (ch3).

¹⁷⁵ See **Suppati S** (S 4.7), SD 32.13 (1): The Buddha’s daily routine.

¹⁷⁶ DA 1:45-48; SA 1:241-246; AA 1:63-67; SnA 131-134. For Eng tr of **DA 1:45-48**, see Bodhi (tr), *The All-embracing Net of View*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Soc, 1978:103-106.

At times, the Buddha goes a long way for alms, even travelling through the air, when only arhats with super-powers are allowed to accompany him.¹⁷⁷ Sometimes, he goes in a normal manner, sometimes accompanied by many wonders. After the meal, he returns to his cell. This is his **preprandial or before-meal routine** (*pure, bhatta kicca*).

Then, the Buddha, having washed his feet,¹⁷⁸ emerges from his cell, talks to the monks and admonishes them. To those who ask for meditation-subjects, he would instruct them according to their temperament and ability. He would then retire to his cell and, if he so desires, sleep for a while. After that, he surveys the world with his divine eye, seeking whom he may help.¹⁷⁹ After that, he would instruct those who come to consult him.

In the evening, he washes, and then, during the first watch (6.00-10.00 pm), attends to monks seeking his advice. The middle watch (10.00-2.00 am) is spent with devas and others who come to consult him. The last watch (2.00-6.00 am) is divided into *three parts*: the first part is spent in mindful walking by way of exercise and meditation; during the second, he sleeps (around 3.00-5.00 am); and in the third he spends reflecting on those who, on account of past good karma, are capable of benefiting from his teaching and appear in his vision. Only those who are tractable (*veneyyā*), that is, have the capacity for benefiting by his instruction, and who possess karmic affinity (*upanissaya*), appear before the Buddha's divine eye. (DA 2:470)

5.6.2 The Buddha's quarters. The Buddha's personal quarters is called the "fragrant cell" (*gandha, kuti*), specially built by Anātha, piṇḍika for the Buddha (J 1:92). It is located in the centre of the Anātha, piṇḍika's monastery park, in Jeta, vana, near Sāvathī. The area around it is called "the fragrant-cell compound" (*gandha, kuṭi pariveṇa*), where monks would often assemble for the Buddha's instruction on important matters (J 1:50, 3:67).

The Commentaries say that the fragrant cell and the legs of the Buddha's bed are always in the same exact spot for all the buddhas (DA 2:424; BA 298). The Buddha is said to have spent 19 rains in the fragrant cell (DhA 1:3; BA 3). The cell is so called probably because devotees would place fragrant offerings, such as flowers, sandalwood powder, and perfume there.¹⁸⁰

It is also said that wherever the Buddha is, none has the power of going through the air above him (SnA 1:222). Another sacred spot related to the Buddha is his footprint. In fact, it is called the "footprint shrine" (*pada, cetiya*). This special shrine, it is said, can be seen only when he so allows it, in which case, then no one can efface it (MA 5:92). He can also make it such that that only a particular person could see it (DhA 3:194).

5.7 THE BUDDHA'S PERSONALITY. One of the Buddha's prominent characteristics, often mentioned in the suttas, is his love of quiet (*appa, sadda*)¹⁸¹ and solitude (*paṭisallāna*).¹⁸² When he is in retreat, it is not the proper time (*akāla*) to see him (D 2:270). The Buddha's disciples often emulate his example here.¹⁸³ On account of this, other sectarians, used to socializing and unrestrained talk, often accuse the Buddha of being anti-social.

The Udumbārikā Sīha, nāda Sutta (D 52), for example, records the wanderer Nigrodha as accusing the Buddha, thus: "Well now, houselord [Sandhāna], do you know with whom the recluse Gotama talks?

¹⁷⁷ Such as when he visits the monk Puṇṇa at Sunāparanta: See **Puṇṇ'ovada S** (M 245) @ SD 20.15(1.7); MA 5:90; ThaA 1:145, 169.

¹⁷⁸ Comys: The Buddha's body needed no cleansing. Dirt slipped off it as water off a lotus leaf. But he did not neglect human duties, lest it should be said that he was not human (SA 1:174). We see here the start of a mythologization or deification of the Buddha, flowering in the Mahāyāna.

¹⁷⁹ DhA 1:319; Eg the case of Mahā Duggata, the poorest man in Sāvathī, as related in **Paṇḍita Sāmaṇera Vattu** (DhA 6.5.5a/2:132 f),

¹⁸⁰ See Ency Bsm 5:296: Gandhakutī.

¹⁸¹ **Paṭṭhapāda S**, D 9.4/1:179.

¹⁸² (**Anāpāna, sati**) **Vesālī S** (S 54.9) (the Buddha goes for a fortnight of solitary retreat (S 54.9/5:320 f), SD 73.-10; **Tapussa S** (A 9.41), the Buddha encourages the layman Tapussa to practise spiritual solitude) (A 9.41/4:438 f), SD 62.16; **Paṭisallāna S**, "the Discourse on Solitude" (It 2.2.8/39 f), SD 41.4.

¹⁸³ **Udumbarikā Sīha, nāda S**, D 25.3/3:37.

Whom does he converse with? From whom does he find his clarity of wisdom? The recluse Gotama is destroyed by the solitary life. He is awkward in an assembly. He is no good at conversation. Just as a one-eyed cow, walking in circles, keeps to the fringes (of a field); the recluse Gotama is only occupied with the fringes of things. Indeed, householder, if the recluse Gotama were to come to this assembly, we will baffle him with a single question, we will knock him over like an empty pot!"¹⁸⁴ However, when the Buddha actually meets and invites him to discuss his own religious views, he fails miserably to redeem himself.

The Buddha is, of course, unaffected by such negative remarks. Nor does he ever asks for praise, but if his praises were uttered in his presence, he takes no offence (ThaA 2:42). He himself is quick to praise others where praise is due, such as when the wise lay practitioner of satipatthana, Pessa, answers his questions on the four kinds of people correctly, as recorded in **the Kandaraka Sutta** (M 51).¹⁸⁵

So great is the Buddha's lovingkindness, it is said that no bad karma can fruit in his presence (SnA 2:475). This is understandable when those in his presence are moved by his lovingkindness and spirituality, so that their hearts are moved to goodness, at least for that duration.

Like Mahā Kassapa, the Buddha prefers to accept alms from the poor (DhA 2:135).¹⁸⁶ In this way, the poor would benefit from associating with him and gaining merit from the alms-giving so that they are uplifted from their poverty. [4.3.3]

5.8 THE BUDDHA'S FEELINGS

5.8.1 A buddha is completely immune from *mental* difficulties, but does on occasions suffer *physical* illness or pain.¹⁸⁷ This is understandable for although his mind is fully liberated, his body is still physical, and is, as such, subject to the vicissitudes of the elements. The body is made up of the 4 primary elements, earth, water, fire and wind,¹⁸⁸ which are all subject to change, pain, and uncertainty. From **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), which records the last days of the Buddha, we know that the Buddha feels bodily pain. In the Sutta, the 80-year-old Buddha describes how he is attacked by severe sickness (such as dysentery) and sharp physical pains (such as back-ache), which he can only overcome through deep meditation.¹⁸⁹

5.8.2 One of the most interesting things we know about the Buddha from the suttas is that he *feels* for his disciples. **The Salayatana Vibhanga Sutta** (M 137), the discourse on the analysis of the 6 elements, for example, explains how the Buddha responds to his listeners, that is, by way of the 3 bases of mindfulness (*satipatthāna*) (which is different from the better known set of 4 focuses of mindfulness). The three bases of mindfulness are about how the Buddha responds to *3 types of situations* when he teaches.

The Buddha teaches, says the Sutta, thinking, "Here, bhikshus, the Teacher teaches the Dharma to his disciples, out of compassion, for their happiness, moved by compassion, thinking, "This is for your welfare! This is for your happiness!" His disciples respond thus:

(1) They do not wish to listen, do not pay attention, do not make an effort to understand the Teaching, and deviate from the Teaching. As such, the Buddha is *not* pleased, but although not feeling pleased, *he dwells untroubled, mindful and clearly comprehending*.

¹⁸⁴ D 25.5/3:38 @ SD 1.4.

¹⁸⁵ M 51.7a/1:342 @ SD 32.9.

¹⁸⁶ In **Paṇḍita Sāmaṇera Vatthu** (DhA 6.5), it is said that during Kassapa Buddha's time, Mahā Duggata, the poorest man in Sāvattihī (so that he is known as "the prince of paupers"). He goes right up to the Buddha's fragrant cell and beseeches the Buddha to be his refuge and bless him. Since he has nothing to offer the Buddha, he hands him his own bowl (since all he desires is to offer food to the Buddha). It is said that Sakra, the king of the devas himself, fills the bowl with food. Mahā Duggata's fortune changes and he becomes a rich man. Here, we are made to understand that the Buddha's presence is merely the occasion for the ripening of his good karma, which is that in his previous life, he had a great desire to offer almsfood to the Buddha. In his last life he is reborn as Paṇḍita Dāraka, becomes a novice and attains arhathood at 7 (with the assistance of Sāriputta). (Dh 80; DhA 6.5.5b/2:139)

¹⁸⁷ **Salāyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137.21-24/3:221 f) + SD 29.5(3.2): The Buddha *has* feelings.

¹⁸⁸ On the 4 primary elements, see **Khandha I Rūpa**, SD 17.2a.

¹⁸⁹ D 16,2.26/2:100 f @ SD 9.

(2) Some of his disciples listen, pay attention, make an effort to understand the Teaching, and do not deviate from the Teaching. As such, the Buddha *is* pleased, but although feeling pleased, *he dwells untroubled, mindful and clearly comprehending*.

(3) His disciples listen, pay attention, make an effort to understand the Teaching, and do not deviate from the Teaching. As such, the Buddha *is* pleased, but although feeling pleased, *he dwells untroubled, mindful and clearly comprehending*.

These 3 bases of mindfulness, the Buddha declares, is what “the noble one attends to, attending to which the noble one is a teacher worthy of instructing the masses” (M 137).¹⁹⁰

It is clear from this Saḷāyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta passage that the Buddha (and other awakened beings) do have feelings towards how others respond to the Dharma. This is only natural, and indeed it would be very curious if the Buddha and the arhats had no feelings at all! The “negative” feelings are simply a reflection of the reality of the situation, but none of these feelings affect or trouble the Buddha or the saint in any way: they only see the arising of great compassion to remove the suffering and ignorance of these beings.¹⁹¹

This is the true meaning of equanimity, and it is a quality we need to constantly cultivate. We may feel disappointed when others do not seem to respond positively to the good we have done. Or, sometimes, people may seem overwhelmed by the kindness we have shown. Either way, we should be mindful and remain unaffected by them, that is, whether their response is negative or positive. The meaning is that we should not depend on external conditions for our true happiness. We should cultivate the kind of inner happiness that is good in itself, that is independent of any condition. This is called *unconditional love*.

5.9 THE BUDDHA’S HEALTH AND LIFE-SPAN

5.9.1 On account of the Buddha’s powers, he alone can digest the food of the devas or food which is infused with ambrosia (*ojā*) by the devas. No one else can eat with impunity the food which has been set aside for the Buddha (SnA 1:154). Apparently, this capacity of the Buddha is due to his great meditative powers.

5.9.2 Every buddha has the power of living for the whole of a human life-span (*kappa*), but no buddha does so, as his life-span is often affected by the climate and the food he takes (DA 2:413). The Commentary explains that *kappa* here means “a life-span” (*āyu, kappa*), the full human life-span during that particular age (DA 2:554 f).

In the **Mahā’padāna Sutta** (D 14), the Buddha mentions the various lifespans of the 6 past buddhas, that is: Vipassī, 80,000 years; Sikhī, 70,000 years; Vessabhū, 60,000 years; Kakusandha, 40,000 years; Konāgamaṇa, 30,000 years; Kassapa, 20,000 years.¹⁹² (Interestingly, none of these Buddha’s lifespan is mentioned to be as long as a “fortunate world-cycle,” *bhadda, kappa*, as claimed by the elder Mahā, sīva).¹⁹³ Then, in the same Sutta, the Buddha goes on to declare,

My own lifespan now, bhikshus, is trifling and short, quick to pass. One who lives long (here) lives only for more or less a hundred years.

Mayham bhikkhave etarahi appakam āyu-p, pamāṇam parittam lahusam, yo ciram jīvati so vassa, sataṃ appam vā bhīyyo.
(D 14, 7/2:4), SD 49.8

In the **Vepulla Pabbata Sutta** (S 15.20), the Buddha says exactly the same of “the lifespan of the Magadhans.”¹⁹⁴ The phrase “more or less a hundred years” (*vassa, sataṃ appam vā bhīyyo*) is stock.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ M 137, 21-24/3:221 f @ SD 29.5.

¹⁹¹ Even non-arhat saints and cultivated practitioners feel “restlessness” (*uddhacca*), which is not really negative, as they are directed towards the desire to know the Dharma or out of love for it: see **Kiṃ Mūlaka S** (A 8:83) @ SD 32.10(2.5.3).

¹⁹² On the past buddhas, see **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14), SD 49.8 (2).

¹⁹³ DA 2:554; SA 3:251; AA 4:143; UA 323. See below here (c)(2).

¹⁹⁴ S 15.20/2:192 @ SD 49.7. The elder Mahā, sīva was a Sinhala monk mentioned by Buddhaghosa.

¹⁹⁵ D 14.7/ 2:4 = S 4.9/1:108 = 15.20/2:192; qu at DA 2:413.

Some, like the elder Mahāsīva (a Sinhala monk mentioned by Buddhaghosa), thought that if the Buddha could live for *ten months*, overcoming the pains of death, he could as well continue to live to the end of this “auspicious aeon” (*bhadda,kappa*). No buddha, however, has been known ever to do so, because he would wish to die before his body is overcome by the infirmities of old age (DA 2:555). Actually, there is a better reason: it is unlikely that *kappa* here means an aeon, because it is neither possible nor necessary that two buddhas meet one another, even in the same world cycle.¹⁹⁶ [3.1]

5.9.3 No buddha, however, dies, that is, attains final nirvana, before his dispensation has been firmly established (D 3:122). According to a commentarial tradition, there are 3 kinds of “final nirvana” (*parinibbāna*) of a buddha, that is,

- (1) the final nirvana of the defilements (*kilesa parinibbāna*),
- (2) the final nirvana of the aggregates (*khandha parinibbāna*), and
- (3) the final nirvana of the relics (*dhātu parinibbāna*).

The first occurs with the Buddha’s awakening under the Bodhi tree at Gayā, the second is when he finally passes away at Kusinārā, and the third in the distant future, when it is said, all his bodily relics from various parts of the world would assemble together under the Bodhi tree (at the original site in India) in a single golden mass and then disperse in a burst of great radiance (DA 3:899 f).¹⁹⁷

Some buddhas live longer than others. Those who are long-lived, have only living disciples (*sammukha,sāvaka*), that is, those who hear the Dharma directly from the Buddha himself, and at their death, their relics are not scattered, but have only a single stupa erected over them (SnA 194, 195). Short-lived buddhas hold the uposatha (precept-day conclave) once a fortnight; others (eg Kassapa Buddha) may have it once in six months; yet others (eg Vipassī) only once in six years (ThaA 1:62).

The most important function of the Vinaya is, of course, to perpetuate the Dharma-Vinaya. It is said that those buddhas who promulgate the monastic code (*pātimokkha*), such as Kakucchanda, Konagamaṇa, Kassapa, and Gotama, the holy life and the teaching they initiate last very long.¹⁹⁸ It is because of the lineages of Vinaya-keeping monastics (especially the forest tradition) that we can still taste the sweet freedom of the Dharma-Vinaya even today. [6.1]

5.10 AFTER THE BUDDHA DIES

5.10.1 When the Buddha dies, his body is honoured like that of a world monarch (D 2:141 f).¹⁹⁹ It is said that on the night when a buddha gains awakening, and on the night of his final passing away, his complexion becomes exceedingly bright, that is, he *transfigures* (D 2:134)²⁰⁰ [3.3.2]. We see here the hints of a deification of the Buddha.

5.10.2 After the Buddha’s death, according to the Commentaries,²⁰¹ his teaching is gradually forgotten and lost following this sequence:

- (1) The Abhidhamma, beginning with the Paṭṭhāna (the most difficult of the seven books) and ending with the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī.
- (2) Aṅguttara Nikāya (in the Sutta Piṭaka), from the eleventh book (*nipāta*) to the first book.
- (3) Saṃyutta Nikāya, from the Cakka,peyyāla²⁰² to the Ogha,taṇa Sutta (S 1.1).
- (4) Majjhima Nikāya, from the Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta (M 152) to the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta (M 1).
- (5) Dīgha Nikāya from the Das’uttara Sutta (D 34) to the Brahmajāla Sutta (D 1).

¹⁹⁶ On the meaning of *kappa*, see (2.2)n above.

¹⁹⁷ For a history of Gotama Buddha’s relics, see DPPN sv Gotama.

¹⁹⁸ V 3:7 f; cf D 2:48. See **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16), SD 9 (9a).

¹⁹⁹ **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.5.12/2:142), SD 9; also at **Thūpāraha S** (A 4.245/2:245 f).

²⁰⁰ **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.4.35-38/2:142), SD 9.

²⁰¹ DA 3:898 f; MA 4:115 f; VbhA 432.

²⁰² It means “The Wheel Repetition,” a name which is not found anywhere in the Pali Canon except in the Vinaya (V 3:98, 142, 5:106). DPPN identifies this with S 5:456-458, which would be **Chiggaḷa,yuga S 2** (S 56.48), which is the 8th sutta in the Pāpata Vagga (the 5th vagga). The very last vagga of Saṃyutta is Pañca,gati Peyyāla Vagga, containing 30 suttas (the very last of which is Petti-d-eva,petti,visaya S (S 56.131). “Cakka Peyyāla” could refer to this last *peyyāla* (the name was somehow changed at some time during transmission), or some earlier chapter.

Scattered verses (*gāthā*), such as the Sabhiya Pucchā (the Questions of Sabhiya, Sn 3.6), and the Ālavaka Pucchā (the Questions of Ālavaka, Sn 1.10), last much longer, but they cannot sustain the dispensation. The last collection of “basket” (*piṭaka*) to disappear is the Vinaya, ending with the matrix (*mātikā*) of the Two Analyses (*ubhato,vibhaṅga*), that is, the Pāṭimokkhas of the monks and of the nuns.²⁰³

5.10.3 These predictions are problematic, however, as there is no way we can really know the future (for, if this is possible, then our lives are predetermined and fated, so that spiritual effort is useless). Firstly, these are clearly late prophecies, made at the time when the Abhidhamma had been compiled.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, the ancient texts never include the ability to foresee the future as one of the Buddha’s powers. Prophecies attributed to the Buddha or a senior disciple, such as Mahā Kassapa, serve merely as a warning of likely moral decline of the sangha,²⁰⁵ and a warning that real dangers of spiritual decline lie *within* the community rather than from external threats.²⁰⁶

5.11 THE BUDDHA’S NAMES

5.11.1 Although non-Buddhists often address the Buddha by name, usually as “master Gotama” (*bhogotama*) or as “the Sakya sage” (*sākya,muni*), his followers never refer to him by name, but use various epithets. **The (Tathāgata) Samaṇa Sutta** (A 8.85) gives eight such appellatives (*adhivacana*), that is, “the recluse” (*samaṇa*),²⁰⁷ “the brahmin” (*brāhmaṇa*), “one accomplished in spiritual knowledge” (*vedagū*),²⁰⁸ “the physician” (*bhisakka*), “the immaculate” (*nimmala*), “the stainless” (*vimala*), “the knower” (*ñānī*) and “the freed” (*vimutta*).²⁰⁹

5.11.2 Buddhaghosa mentions seven others, that is, “the one with the eyes” (*cakkhumā*), “benefactor of all beings” (*sabba,bhūtānukampī*), “washed clean [baptized]” (*nhātaka*), “destroyer of Māra’s forces” (*māra,seṇāpamaddī*), “attained to perfection” (*vusitavā*), “freed” (*vimutta*) and “whose body emits sun-rays” (*aṅgī,rasa*) (DA 3:962 f). Such terms clearly allude to his awakened state and its attending virtues.

5.11.3 The Buddha generally speaks of himself as “thus come” (*tathāgata*). This term is explained at great length in the Commentaries.²¹⁰ His followers usually address him as “the Blessed One” (*bhagavā*), “Well Gone” (*sugata*), or most often simply as “venerable sir” or *bhante*.²¹¹ Gotama Buddha is often

²⁰³ DA 3:898 f; MA 4:115 f; VbhA 432.

²⁰⁴ These prophecies could not have been made earlier than Asoka’s time (c 304-232 BCE), when the Kathāvatthu (the latest of the 7 Abhidhamma books) was compiled by Moggalīputta Tissa, who convened the 3rd Buddhist Council.

²⁰⁵ **Anāgata Bhaya S 3** (A 5.79) eg warns against: (1) ordaining those who are unable to keep to the training, (2) monastics who fail to keep to the tutelage, (3) monastics who are incompetent in giving Dharma teachings, (4) those who neglect the Dharma and turn to outside and secular teachings, and (5) those who in the holy life, enjoying luxurious lives. (A 5.79/3:105-108), SD 1.10(3.3); cf S 17.3/2:226 f, 20.7/2:266 f.

²⁰⁶ **Anāgata Bhaya S 4** (A 5.80) eg warns against monastics forsaking the solitary forest for urban living out of desire for: (1) fine robes, (2) fine food, (3) comfortable lodgings, (4) socializing with the nuns, probationers and female novices, and (5) fraternizing with the laity and owning wealth and real estate. (A 5.80/3:108-110; cf S 2:195 f; Miln 401).

²⁰⁷ Qu at SnA 161.

²⁰⁸ For a def, see UA 119.

²⁰⁹ A 8.85/4:340.

²¹⁰ Eg DA 1:59 f. On *tathāgata*, see *Buddhānussati*, SD 15.7(2).

²¹¹ *Bhante* simply means “sir,” often tr as “venerable sir” or simply “bhante” when a monk is addressed. On laymen being addressed as bhante, see **Yamaka S** (S 22.86.39/3:113), SD 16.5; on laymen saints addressed as āyasmā, see **Gilāyana S** (S 55.54.5(1)) & n, SD 4.10; cf **Thāna S** (S 4.92/2:187-190), SD 14.11b. See also **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97.27/2:192) @ SD 4.9(5).

addressed as “Sakka” (Sn 345), which may be a form of the word Sākya; “Brahmā”,²¹² “the great sage” (*mahā,muni*, BA 38); and “the yaksha” (tutelary spirit) (*yakkha*).²¹³

5.11.4 He has been given numerous other epithets, especially in later works. The best known set of epithets are **his 9 worthy qualities** (*navāraha,guṇa*) used as an inspiring meditation, that is, the recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), thus: “So, too, is he the Blessed One: for, he is arhat, fully self-awakened one, accomplished in wisdom and conduct, well-farer, knower of worlds, peerless guide of persons to be tamed, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed” (*iti’pi so bhagavā: araham sammā,sambuddho, vijiā,carāṇa,sampanno, sugato, lokavidū, anuttaro purisa,damma,sārathi, satthā deva,manussānam, buddho, bhagavā*).²¹⁴ These virtues are very efficacious as an “inspiring meditation” to boost our meditation, especially when we are having difficulties with the breath meditation or the cultivation of lovingkindness.²¹⁵

5.11.5 In short, on account of the Buddha’s boundless virtues, it can be said that his praises are immeasurable (*aparimāṇa*) (DA 1:288). In meditation, such a *name* or *virtue* is a sound or an idea that we use to maintain a mental link with someone or something (an idea) that is sacred and empowering (here meaning conducing to mental stillness and bliss). In this case, it is with someone who is the source of spiritual joy and wisdom. Recalling and reflecting on such a name is like singing a sweet song we love: it energizes us. But more than a song, a name or epithet of the Buddha is a reflection of the Buddha’s wisdom, compassion and awakening, and a reminder that we are capable of attaining them, too.

6 The future Buddha

6.1 THE BUDDHA’S DEATH

6.1.1 To the unawakened and the less spiritually inclined, the Buddha’s death [5.9.3] is something difficult to accept. For those who hero-worship him, they are understandably shocked to see their hero die. The more religiously or philosophically resourceful amongst them, in denying his death, see him as a superhuman, effectively deifying him. Hero-worship then becomes idol-worship, in the literal sense. In some cases, such faithful even believe that the Buddha is present in some form in his images or in the stupa dedicated to him.²¹⁶

6.1.2 In response to the Buddha’s death, the more conservative Buddhists who showed a deference for the early teachings, came up with the conception of other buddhas, perhaps by way of psychological compensation. While the Mahayanist trend was to populate their *space* with cosmic buddhas, the more conservative Hinayanists saw more buddhas in terms of *time*. The Theravadins, for example, developed the cults of past buddhas and future buddhas, with the former more developed than the latter.

6.1.3 While the cult of past buddhas provides such Buddhists with some kind of *religious roots* into the timeless past, the cult of the future buddha is more *eschatological and prophetic* in nature. The coming of the future buddha is linked with the end-times of society, marked with moral decline, so that such stories serve as warnings against immorality and as guidelines for spiritual cultivation. The

²¹² *Brahma* (**adj**) has a range of meanings: divine, perfect. Inflected forms: **nom** *brahmā* (V 1:5; D 2:46; J 6:486; Miln 224; Vism 2 *brahmānaṃ atibrahmā*, ep of the Buddha; SnA 229 *brahmā mahā’nubhāvo*, 418); **acc** *brahmānaṃ* (D 2:37); **gen abl** *brahmano* (D 2:209; Vism 205; SnA 177); **instr** *brahmanā* (D 1:252, 2:239; Dh 105, 230; Vism 48, 405; DhA 2:60); **voc** *brahme* (S 1:138). Cpd *brahma,samo* (of the Buddha) (Sn 32).

²¹³ *Yaksha*: M 1:386; Sn 478, 875. *Yakkha*, Skt *yakṣa*, Vedic Skt “quick ray of light,” from √YAKṢ, to move quickly, press on. SED: “a living supernatural being, spiritual apparition, ghost, spirit.” It is possible to tr it as “a restless one”; cf the converse relationship of English “spirit” to “sprightly,” ie brisk, stirring; and cf Walter Scott’s “restless sprite” (Lanman, *Sanskrit Reader* 1884:221e). Comys derive the popular etym from √YAJ, to sacrifice: a being to whom a sacrifice (of expiation and propiation) is given (VvA 224, 333). On *yaksha* suttas, see **Yakkha Saṃyutta** (S 10.1-12/1:206-215). See PED: *yakkha*.

²¹⁴ Eg S 11.3/1:219,31; Vism 7.2-67/198-213. See **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7.

²¹⁵ There are 6 inspiring meditation, or 6 bases of recollection (*cha anussati-t,ṭhāna*), viz, the recollections on (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) moral virtue, (5) charity, and (6) the devas. (A 6.26/3:314 f), SD 15.6.

²¹⁶ For modern scholarly views (Buddhisms of the scholars) on this, see eg Strong 2004:3-5.

mythology of the past and future buddhas provides an assurance of sort that there will always be, at some time or other, buddha we can turn to in our spiritual needs.

6.2 PROPHECIES

6.2.1 The early Buddhist suttas, however, contain some prophetic statements,²¹⁷ but their avowed purpose is not a threat of an impending global cataclysm and end of days, but that of *liberation here and now*. The only prophecy in the Dīgha Nikāya is that of the coming of the future buddha Metteyya (Skt Maitreya) in our world cycle, found in **the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26),²¹⁸ and at the end of a late work, **the Buddha,vaṃsa**, as the fifth buddha of this aeon (B 27.19).²¹⁹ The only canonical details we have of the future buddha are found here. These discourses were probably composed or reached their final form during Asokan times.

6.2.2 Buddhist prophecy, as presented in the early suttas, is characteristically *didactic*. For example, the prophecy in the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta is immediately followed by an admonition to practise the four focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*).²²⁰ In due course, however, popular Buddhism emphasized its *eschatological* aspect,²²¹ where, in **the Anāgata,vaṃsa** (The chronicle of the future), for example, the future buddha is addressed as “Ariya Metteyya” or “Arya Maitreya,” that is, as if he is already awakened.²²²

Some manuscripts of this work mention the names of 10 future buddhas, all of whom meet Gotama who prophesizes about them. These are Metteyya, Uttama, Rāma, Pasenadi Kosala, Abhibhū, Dīgha,sonī, Saṅkacca, Subha, Todeyya, and Nālāgiri Palaleyya (sic) (JPTS 1886:37). Such figures, however, are very rare in early Buddhism, even in its post-Buddha forms, but become more numerous and fabulous in the Mahāyāna traditions. [7]

6.2.3 The future buddhas are also mentioned in **the Dasa,bodhisatt’uppatti,kathā** (“the talk on the arising of the ten Bodhisattvas”), a late 14th-century Sinhala work. It tells the story of Metteyya in detail, with the stories of the other nine future buddhas more briefly. Some of the stories speak of bodily sacrifices, self-cremation, self-mutilation and the offering of children.²²³ Such stories and details, however, significantly differ from those given in the Anāgata,vaṃsa. **K R Norman** notes that this is probably a late 14th-century work, when Mahāyāna and Hindu influences in Sri Lanka were strong. (1983b:161)

6.2.4 The future buddha Metteyya and the world monarch Saṅkha are also the subjects of a poem in 142 verses called **the Anāgata,vaṃsa**.²²⁴ The lateness of this work (and the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta) are clearly evident because they treat *both* the world teacher and the world monarch as living in the *same* time and place, and even meeting each other. We never see this in the Canon, where the general idea is that only one such person can arise in the world. This is simple logic: if we follow the biographical pattern in the lives of future buddhas, at their birth they are prophesized as either becoming a world monarch (if they remain as householders) or a world teacher (if they renounce the world). It is traditionally impossible that two such individuals would arise together.²²⁵

²¹⁷ However, see **The Dharma-ending age**, SD 1.10.

²¹⁸ D 26/3:58-79 (SD 36.10).

²¹⁹ B 27.19/101.

²²⁰ D 26.25-27/3:75 f (SD 36.10).

²²¹ See eg Jan Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time. Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline*, Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991. Reviewed by Ria Kloppenborg, *Numen* 412 May 1994:208 f.

²²² **Anāgata,vaṃsa** (by Mahā Kassapa of Nāgānana Vihāra, Coḷa, S India; 12-13th cent), ed J Minayeff, JTPS 1886; *Anāgatavaṃsa Desanā*, tr fr Sinhala by Udaya Meddegama (ed with intro & nn by JC Holt), 1993 (a short version of Anāgata,vaṃsa); and <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/metteyya/arimet00.htm>.

²²³ Dasa,bodhisatt’uppatti,kathā, ed H Saddhātissa, London, 1975:103.

²²⁴ Ed J P Minayeff, JPTS 1886:33-53; E Leumann, *Maitreya Samiti*, Strassburg, 1919:184-226.

²²⁵ For collected essays on **Metteyya**, see Alan Sponberg & Helen Hardacre (edd), *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 1988.

7 Cosmic buddhas, bodhisattvas and Buddhist theism

7.1 THE DEIFIED BUDDHA

7.1.1 The Buddha as saviour. After the Buddha's time, especially in the Mahāyāna, the number of buddhas, *past*, *present* and *future*, increased, proportionately, as it were, with their growing awareness of an expanding universe and infinitesimals, and with Buddhist attempts at answering challenges from other religions. The Sanskrit poem on the Buddha's life, **the Lalita, vistara**, has a list of 54 buddhas,²²⁶ and **the Mahā, vastu**, more than a hundred (Mvst 1:243). Such works present the Buddha in a more legendary form, reflecting the philosophy and theology of their writers.

The Lalita, vistara or more fully, **the Lalita, vistara Sūtra**²²⁷ or Discourse on the Elaborate Sport (between 1st-3rd century), in 27 chapters of mixed prose and verse, is a composite work with no single author, with some material from the Sarvāstī, vāda. Originally, it was not a Buddhist work, but Mahāyāna elements were added at a time when the “three bodies” (*trikāya*) doctrine was developing.²²⁸ It is a life of the Buddha presented as an autobiography, whose episodes have been immortalized in the friezes and bas reliefs of the Candi Borobudur in Java, Indonesia.²²⁹

The Mahāvastu (2nd century CE), too, is a composite work, the earliest sections of which go back to the 2nd century BCE. It incorporates many short sutras and jatakas, linked to the core biography of the Buddha. It is a **Mahāsaṅghika** work, preserved in its Vinaya in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, but without any translation in Chinese or Tibetan. The story presents a docetic²³⁰ form of the Buddha, regarding him as being “supramundane” (*lokottara*), that is, *not* of this world. The branch of the Mahāsaṅghika that upheld such a dogma was known as the Lokottara, vāda (the Supramundane School).

According to their view, this is not to say that the Buddha who appeared in India some 2600 years ago was false, but that he was not what he appeared to be. We see him going through the motions of a normal human being—being born, seeing the truth, awakening, teaching the Dharma, taking almsfood, attending to his bodily functions, and passing away. But these are merely a “play” (*līla*) for the benefit of worldlings. Such a docetic view of the Buddha can be found in what little remains of Mahāsaṅghika literature, that is, **the Mahāvastu** and their **Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya**.

According to the Lokottara, vāda, since the Buddha was a transcendent being, even his physical body (*rūpa, kāya*) was imperishable and incorruptible. In fact, the Buddha was viewed by them as being omni-

²²⁶ Download Lalitavistara from Greta: http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/gretit/1_sanskr/4_rellit/buddh/bsu022_u.htm.

²²⁷ The title “Sutra” was added by the composer/s of this work, or by later authorities. The presence of “Sutra” in a title does not automatically mean that it is an early Buddhist text. In later works, esp in China, “Sutra” is added to the text as simply a way of authenticating it.

²²⁸ Once the Buddha was seen as having transcended his humanity, the Mahāyāna theologians honed their genius to develop **the Tri, kāya** (“three bodies”) doctrine. Conventional terms like *dharmā, kāya* (Dharma-body or embodiment of Dharma) were taken literally or theistically. The Tri, kāya are (1) the Emanated Body (*nirmāṇa, kāya*), or the historical Buddha, whose role is now relegated to that of a “phantom” Buddha appearing on earth only as a “play or sport” for the benefit of the masses (like a picture we see on TV or the computer); (2) the Enjoyment Body (*sambhoga, kāya*) or glorified Buddha forms, inhabiting paradises, replete with Bodhisattvas and wonders (like the electronic transmission on the Internet or the TV waves), and (3) the Truth Body (*dharmā, kāya*), the ultimate truth or absolute reality (like the software writer or the TV newscaster). For those who accepted this Buddhology, their emphasis shifted from the meditation of early Buddhism to an increasingly devotional, even supplicatory and magical, faith based on sacred texts and their masters. See Oxford Dict of Bsm: trikāya.

²²⁹ See John Miksic, *Borobudur: Golden Tales of the Buddhas*, Singapore: Periplus Editions, 1990 & for photos: <http://www.photodharma.net/Indonesia/05-Lalitavistara/05-Lalitavistara-Thumbs.htm>.

²³⁰ Docetism refers to the view where the reality of a holy figure's (here the Buddha's) physical body was denied, “or at least various of the normal carnal properties and functions were refused in favor of those more spiritual or ethereal” (Macmillan Ency of Religion, 2nd ed 2004: docetism). The Buddha, in other word words, had only the appearance (Gk *dokesis*) of a human, and only seemed (*dokein*) to be a man. The main force behind such a belief here is the denial of the Buddha's death. This is not a popular term in Buddhist studies today, but if we are dealing with the divinization of the Buddha, this can be a helpful term. See **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.3 (3.3).

potent, omniscient, omnipresent and eternal—just as the God-believers view their God today. However, there is an important difference: while the God-believers see themselves as *creatures* of a creator, these docetic Buddhists viewed that they can themselves *become* bodhisattvas or buddhas.

7.1.2 The transcendentalization of power. Yet both the docetic Lokōttara, vādins and the modern God-believers share one common notion, that is what I call “the transcendentalization of power.” Both groups have a sense of a powerlessness of the self, even of a personal worthlessness (sin) or guilt, or at least of feeling less powerful, before a greater power—that “I” am nothing, “God” is everything. To really believe in God, in other words, we need to *externalize* spirituality—to compare is to externalize—in such a manner that the *worshipper* (this is what the individual becomes here) is unable to see any personal potential for self-effort or even self-worth.

Those unfamiliar with the possibility and potential of self-effort in spiritual liberation often need to look up to a greater power, just as a subject looking up to an emperor, a king or a potentate.²³¹ He has to feel and be smaller: power differentiates into I and thou, high and low. The best we can behave before such a power is to feel accepted by it, because to be rejected is to lose everything.

7.1.3 Self-emptying. Yet, it is in a total emptying of any self-notion that we can truly free ourselves from such an idea of separation. It is not even a self-emptying; for there is no self to empty. We live deluded by the notion that there is such a self, an eternal something, that we *have*, that we “have” a soul. Some might even venture to claim that we *are* the soul, but this identity (the soul and the body are the same) faces an insurmountable problem: since the body is impermanent, then the soul must be impermanent, too.

Buddhists regard the Buddha as being higher than any holy being, or any being, for that matter, because he has emptied himself of all things and everything. In renouncing the world, the Buddha discovers what the world can never give: full self-awakening and liberation. For a world that is burdened with the notion of a self, the Buddha’s message is that there is *no* such self. Hence, there is no need to be “saved” by anyone. The real existential problem is that we live haunted by the spectre of an eternal soul or some kind of personal entity.

The real problem, therefore, is *not* whether there is a soul or eternal self, but that we *think* that there must be one. What we must give up is not the self or soul—there is none—but the *view* that there is one. Self-view must be abandoned. No wonder, we have so much difficulty and problems with a religion that believes in such a soul: it is trying to define something that is *unreal* as being real, something *non-existent* as existing, something *untrue* as being true. Only in letting go of this self-view are we truly freed. We should at least not identify this “self” or “soul” with the body—for the body is changing every moment—and let go of *the self-identity view* so that we make the first move to true spiritual liberation, and enter the stream to nirvana.²³²

7.2 THE COSMIC BUDDHAS. The study of how Buddhism became mahayanized continues to fascinate and benefit both the scholars and concerned Buddhists. Such a study could, of course, take volumes and much time. There is however *one basic theory* for the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhology and theology.²³³ The Belgian Indologist and Buddhism scholar, Louis de la Vallée Poussin (1869-1938), referring to the

²³¹ While God-believers often see their God or saviour in imperial or regal terms (“my God the King,” Ps 5.2; “King of kings,” 1 Tim 6.15), the Buddha is never depicted in such terms. The term *dharmarāja* often appears in the canon, but it rarely refers to the Buddha, certainly not as a self-description, but as a pious attribution from others (eg S 156/1.48/1:33 = 312/1.20/1:55, by the devata Anātha, piṇḍika; Sn 554 by the brahmin Sela). More often, it refers a “just king,” ie the world emperor: see **Cakka, sīhanāda Sutta** (D 26) @ SD 36.10 (2.1.1.2). Even then, a king or rajah is defined as one who “brings joy to others through justice” (*dharmena pare rañjetī*) (D 27.21/3:93), SD 2.19.

²³² In this light, we can see a bodhisattva or a buddha as someone who understands that we have no need of being *saved* by an externalized saviour. An attempt at correcting this religious aberration would, in later time, be expressed in the Mahayana notion of Buddha-nature [4.2].

²³³ Here I use “theology” in a broad sense of Buddhist attempts at dealing with theism or any kind of systematic study of Buddhism both as an academic subject (open to discourse) and personal practice (as religious commitment).

term *aiśvarika* coined by the British diplomat and Nepalese manuscript collector, Brian H Hodgson,²³⁴ defines it as “the half-*naiyāyika* (ie, theistic), half Śaivite (ie, pantheistic) interpretation of the ontological and religious speculation of the Great Vehicle in the last stage of its development.”²³⁵

The Mahāyāna and Tantric deification of the Buddha can, in at least a simplistic way, be understood, as a powerful expression of their Aiśvarika spirit. The most important development here is surely that of the five “dhyani buddhas,” a popular misnomer of unknown origins but which has stuck fast.²³⁶ The term strictly means “meditating buddhas,” but is often understood as referring to a mandala (P/Skt *maṇḍala*) or psychocosmic circle of *transcendental or cosmic buddhas*, originating from the Ādi,buddha or some form of him, especially Vairocana (the “sun” buddha) (centre), Akṣobhya (the east), Ratna,sambhava (the south), Amitābha (the west), and Amogha,siddhi (the north).²³⁷

These 5 cosmic buddhas are said to be the hypostases or essence of the historical buddhas, whose Sanskrit names are Krakucchanda, Kanaka,muni, Kāśyapa, Gautama and Maitreya, respectively. From each of the cosmic buddhas there issues forth a Dhyani Bodhisattva, that is, Samanta,bhadra, Vajra,pāṇī, Ratna,pāṇī, Padma,pāṇī (or Avalokiteśvara) and Viśva,pāṇī, respectively. As in Saivite iconography, they too each have their own “consort” (*śakti*), family (*kula*), seed mantra (*bīja*), symbol, gesture (*mudrā*), vehicle (*vāhana*), aggregate (*skandha*), element (*dhātu*), sense-object, sense-faculty, direction, colour and body-location.²³⁸

7.3 THE BODHISATTVA

7.3.1 The historical bodhisattva. As Buddhism becomes more globalized, more and more Buddhist terms are accepted into the major English dictionaries, so that these words become anglicized. They become a permanent feature of the English-speaking consciousness, as it were. The dictionary definitions of such words are, as a rule, based on the usages that the lexicographers are familiar with and also based on their understanding of Buddhism. Useful as dictionary meanings of words may be, we need to be sure that such words are defined as their senses are intended in their original texts and contexts. Indeed, a lexicographer’s attention is always limited, and a dictionary must be usefully brief but it is not an encyclopaedia. In short, it is left to us, as writers, speakers, and affirmed Buddhists to clearly define our terms.

The anglicized words bodhisattva and Bodhisattva can mean either the historical bodhisattva or a Mahāyāna conception of Bodhisattva. Their meaning needs to be teased out from the context. Of course, to be technically unambiguous, we can always use the Pali form, bodhisatta or Bodhisatta, to denote the historical buddha’s spiritual career leading up to his awakening. However, where a Buddhist term is widely known, this familiarity gives a great advantage to it as a bridge for informing others about Buddhism. Yet, it still behooves us to define our terms for the sake of clarity and communicating our good intentions.

Here we will first briefly look at the historical bodhisattva, and then the Mahāyāna notion [7.3.3]. We could also use the lower-case *bodhisattva* to denote the historical being bound for awakening (according to early Buddhism), and the capitalized *Bodhisattva* for the Mahāyāna awakening-being (as is done here).²³⁹ This simple system helps to remind us of a *non-technical term* that is prevalent in early Buddhism (such as bodhisattva, arhat, buddhahood and nirvana) and the more technical, philosophized or developed Mahāyāna ideas with the capitalized forms (such as Bodhisattva, Arhat and Buddhahood). This is of course not an exact system, and it can be helpful at least in understanding the writer’s intentions and understanding the terms in their proper contexts.

²³⁴ Brian H Hodgson, *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet*, London, 1874. The term is the adjective form of Īśvara, one of the Hindu names for their theistic notion of God.

²³⁵ Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics 1:93 f, sv Ādibuddha.

²³⁶ The proper traditional terms for these buddhas are *tathāgata* (“thus-come”) or *jina* (“conqueror”), which are old canonical terms.

²³⁷ Ency Bsm: Dhyānībuddha & Dhyānībodhisattva.

²³⁸ See Ency Bsm 4:591 & Piyasilo, *Mandala of the Five Buddhas*, Malaysia, 1989a.

²³⁹ However, an exception is “the Bodhisattva” (capitalized), which refers to our historical Bodhisattva, ie, the Buddha before his awakening.

7.3.2 The meaning of “bodhisattva.” The Pali word *bodhi,satta* comes from *bodhi* meaning “awakening or spiritual understanding,” both of which liberates us from suffering, and *satta*, meaning “being.” *Bodhisatta* then means “a being bound for awakening” or “one devoted (Skt *sakta*) to awakening.”²⁴⁰ As a rule, I have used “bodhisattva” (usually with the small “b”) for this Pali term. Such a bodhisattva’s lengthy career, working on his ten perfections (*dasa pāramī*),²⁴¹ has inspired countless stories illustrating such qualities on three levels, that is, their ordinary, higher and highest levels.²⁴² Such bodhisattva stories, which are of great literary interest and popular edification, are best known as the 547 birth-stories in the *Jātaka Commentary*,²⁴³ and the 35 accounts of **the Cariyā,piṭaka** [1.2]. There are a number of other popular collections of such jatakas, some of them local works, such as the apocryphal **Paṇṇāsa Jātaka** (“the 50 jataka stories”),²⁴⁴ composed in north Thailand before 1265.²⁴⁵

A bodhisattva begins his career when he aspires to gain awakening for the sake of all beings. Living a life of steadfast moral rectitude, he builds up a karmic affinity for meeting future buddhas, to whom he declares his aspiration. His bodhisattva career officially begins, as it were, with a buddha’s confirmation that he is capable of becoming a buddha himself in the distant future. In the case of our Buddha Gotama, as we have seen, he approaches *a total of 24 past buddhas*, beginning with Vipassī [3.3], who is said to have lived 91 world-cycles ago,²⁴⁶ when the bodhisattva is a nāga-king named Atula.²⁴⁷ At the climax of his bodhisattva career, Gotama sits under the Bodhi tree and upon his awakening, he ceases to be a bodhisattva: he is now the Buddha.

7.3.3 The Mahāyāna Bodhisattva. Mahāyāna trends had probably begun by the 2nd century, but flourished only a couple of centuries later.²⁴⁸ If early Buddhism focuses on the *internalizing* of our spirituality, especially through moral cultivation and meditation, the Mahāyāna inclination is that of *externalizing* religiosity, of ritual purification (such as through text recitation and invoking sacred names), and of *philosophizing* spirituality and enlightenment²⁴⁹ (such as the Prajñā,pāramitā or Perfection of Wisdom literature and the Madhyamaka system).

The most enduring and endearing Mahāyāna innovation is clearly that of the Bodhisattva. Using a form of Sanskrit, which scholars call Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, the Mahāyāna thinkers derived the term **Bodhisattva** from *bodhi* (enlightenment) and *sattva* (being, substance, essence), so that we have the sense of “enlightenment-being.”²⁵⁰ The earlier version of the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva is close to that of the early

²⁴⁰ For a useful summary on the etymology of *bodhisatta*, see Analayo 2010:19 n18.

²⁴¹ The 10 perfections (*dasa,pāramī*) are: (1) giving (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*sīla*), (3) renunciation (*nekkhamma*), (4) wisdom (*paññā*), (5) energy (*virīya*), (6) patience (*khanti*), (7) truthfulness (*sacca*), (8) determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), (9) lovingkindness (*mettā*) and (10) equanimity (*upekkhā*).

²⁴² Ie as perfection (*pāramī*), higher perfection (*upapāramī*) and highest perfection (*paramattha,pāramī*) (B 1.77/-6). Comy explains “perfection” as the giving of external things (*bāhira,bhaṇḍa,pariccāga*), “higher perfection” as the sacrifice of one’s own limbs (*āṅga,pariccāga*, which would incl body-parts), and “highest perfection” as the sacrifice of one’s life itself (*jīvita,pariccāga*) (BA 59).

²⁴³ See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1(3.4.3).

²⁴⁴ The work is popular northern Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. The Burmese call it Zimmé Jātaka, the prefix being a Burmese cognate of “Chiangmai,” where it is thought to have been composed before 1265. Historically, it is said to have been written in Haripunchai, a Mon kingdom which flourished 661-1292, and which produced other great local Buddhist literature. Haripunchayai is centred around modern Lamphun, one of Thailand’s oldest cities, located 26 km south of Chiangmai: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haripunchai>.

²⁴⁵ Niyada Laosunthorn, *Pannasa Jataka: Its Genesis and Significance to Thai Poetical Works*, Bangkok: Mae Kham Pang, 1995:295. See also Prakong Nimmahemin, *The Northern Folktales*, Bangkok: Social Science Association, 1974 & Pat Pengpala, *Jataka and Thai Literature*, Bangkok: Ramkhamheang University Press, 1985.

²⁴⁶ **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14.1.4/2:2-7), SD 49.8.

²⁴⁷ B 5.15/158, 22.10/340; J 1:34,20, 41,12.

²⁴⁸ For a helpful summary, see Alan Cole, “Schisms in Buddhism,” in (edd) James R Lewis & Sarah M Lewis, *Sacred Schisms*, Cambridge Univ Press, 2009:66-74.

²⁴⁹ Throughout I have reserved “awakening” for *bodhi* in the early Buddhist sense, and “enlightenment” in the later senses.

²⁵⁰ For a list of possible etyms (but somewhat dated), see Har Dayal 1932:4-9.

Buddhist prototype. He goes before a buddha for a confirmation, and practises **the six perfections** (*ṣaḍ-pāramitā*)—(1) generosity (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*śīla*), (3) patience (*kṣānti*), (4) courageous energy (*vīrya*), (5) meditation (*samādhi*), and (6) wisdom (*prajñā*)—which was later increased to ten to complement **the ten stages** (*bhūmi*) of the Bodhisattva’s career.²⁵¹ The additional perfections are: (7) skillful means (*upāya kauśalya*), (8) vow (*pranidhāna*), (9) power (*śakti*) and (10) knowledge (*jñāna*).

In due course, the view became popular that these beings are *already enlightened*. So great is their compassion that they have postponed their entry into nirvana to remain in this world to save all beings. They are regarded as the hypostases or manifestations of primordial or eternal buddha (*ādi, buddha*), named Samanta, bhadrā, Vajra, dhara and so on. A close study of the rise of the Mahāyāna is a fascinating survey of how a living religion (Buddhism) skillfully and successfully converts the deities, demons, doctrines and doxology of the dominant religion of India at that time, that is, Saivism.²⁵²

7.3.4 Significance: The nature of the Mahāyāna

7.3.4.1 WHAT REALLY IS “MAHĀYĀNA”? Scholars are still debating on how exactly the Mahāyāna arose. They understandably love or should love unsolved issues such as this; for they keep scholars professionally viable and academically relevant. We must also recognize the fact that scholarly continuity and academic excellence have greatly benefitted Buddhist studies, especially in giving us a broader cross-cultural and interdisciplinary awareness of *Buddhism as history and textuality*. An important example here is how we now better understand many of the terms and models used by the Buddha, in contrasting their usages in the brahminical, Jain and other Indian contexts.²⁵³

In-depth textual studies and historical criticisms have given us more clues into some of most interesting aspects of Buddhist history. Scholars have concluded, for example, that the **Mahāyāna**—let us provisionally render it simply as “a broad-minded but innovative attitude toward Buddhism”—probably started with *writing*.²⁵⁴ Mahāyāna, in other words, unlike the oral tradition of early Buddhism, is *a book-religion*. This is very significant, as anyone who has a flair for writing and a drive for self-expression could write their own sutras or texts. Before the profusion of printed books and e-books, the written or printed word is in itself sacred, even magical.

The Mahāyāna writers, thinkers and innovators were a diverse lot. From the diversity of texts they produced, we might surmise that they were creative individuals, even individualists, that is, they generally worked alone. Their works could, of course, have been copied and passed around to some members of their community. Considering the tolerance and latitude that Buddhism is known for, such writers could have freely co-existed even within the same monastery, as long as they were not too vocal about their ideas.

7.3.4.2 DIVERSE TRENDS. The Mahāyāna, as we well know, was from the start neither a sect nor even a movement as we know it today. This is clear from the diversity of ideas, texts and writers that we know as representing the Mahāyāna. For this reason, I have suggested above that we provisionally take Mahāyāna as “a broad-minded but innovative attitude toward Buddhism” [7.3.4.1]. This definition is provisional because there were evidently *reformist* and *revisionist* trends in Mahāyāna, too.

²⁵¹ *Bhūmi*: on the origin of the 10 stages of the Bodhisattva path, see Jan Nattier 2010.

²⁵² See eg Alexander Studholme, *The Origins of Om Mañipadme Hūm: A study of the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, Albany: State Univ of New York Press 2002. See also **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.

²⁵³ See eg the philological insights of **K R Norman**, *A Philological Approach to Buddhism*, The Buddhist Forum vol 5, SOAS, Univ of London, 1997. Vedic scholar, **Joanna Jurewicz**, “Playing with fire: The *pratyasamutpāda* from the perspective of Vedic thought,” *Journal of the Pali Text Soc* 26 2000:77-103, shows how the Buddha skillfully adapts Vedic ideas into the 12-link dependent arising (*paṭicca, samuppāda*) model. Such studies also help us better understand such cryptic verses as **Dh 97**, SD 10.6. On a more basic level, Israeli Buddhist scholar, **Keren Arbel**, applies “source criticism” to examine how terms from outside are adopted and adapted in Buddhist usage: “Buddhist or Not? Thinking anew the role of the jhānas in the path of awakening,” (unpublished, 2008), see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (4.1).

²⁵⁴ See R Gombrich, “How Mahāyāna Began,” in (ed) T Skorupski, *The Buddhist Forum* vol 1, BSOAS, Univ of London, 1990:21-30.

The early Mahāyāna texts, **the Ratna,rāsi**²⁵⁵ and **the Rāṣṭrapāla Paripṛcchā Sūtra**²⁵⁶ (both c late 2nd century), for example, contain *reformist* elements that clearly favour the forest life and ascetic discipline.²⁵⁷ But such efforts are overclouded by *revisionist* writings that reject such practices, especially in later Mahāyāna texts, such as **the Aṣṭa,sāhasrikā Prajñā,pāramitā Sutra**, which, in chapter 21, criticizes the forest practice.²⁵⁸

Some of the best known Mahāyāna writers, like Nagarjuna (c 150-250 CE) and Vasubandhu (4th century), were evidently brilliant scholars and philosophers. In fact, in early Mahāyāna, the trend was that of *philosophical discursiveness*. Although meditation is mentioned in some texts, its treatment is clearly philosophical, too. In other words, it was mostly a non-meditative, even scholastic, milieu.

The (Durabhisambhava) Upāli Sutta (A 10.99) is a rare, probably late, discourse that depicts the Buddha as actually discouraging the monk Upāli from becoming a forest monk. The reason for this is given as that Upāli is not sufficiently developed in his meditation to do so. However, it could well be a discourse reflecting the conditions, either late in the Buddha's life or soon after his passing, when the order is better organized as a settled community.²⁵⁹

7.3.4.3 THE TWO BURDENS. After the Buddha's time, as monastics placed less emphasis on meditation, *the study and mastery of the texts* was given a higher priority. This is understandable in a settled monastic organization that depended on the support of the wealthy laity, who incidentally were less prone to meditation, too. The Commentaries record this new dichotomy as the two burdens or duties (*dhura*), that is, the "burden of scripture study" (*gantha,dhura*) was in due course given greater emphasis than the "burden of meditation" (*vipassanā,dhura*). The Commentaries, compiled around the 6th century CE, contains a number of stories that mention the two burdens.²⁶⁰

When Buddhism was well established in Sri Lanka, after Asoka's time, the inclination towards the "burden of scripture study" was given greater emphasis than the "burden of meditation." The mention of scripture study in Sinhalese Buddhism was made as early as in the first century CE. **The Mahā,vaṃsa**, a hagiographical chronicle of Sri Lanka, reports this as occurring in the time of king Bhātikābhaya (38-66 CE) (Mahv 34.59, 66). In fact, this trend became so popular that Sinhalese Buddhism effectively weakened in its meditation tradition to this day. We now have more "venerable doctors, PhD" than Vinaya-abiding bhikkhus.

The widespread emphasis on textual study in Sinhalese Buddhism encouraged the more expedient and ambitious monks to turn to secular academic scholarship. Psychologically, this could be seen as a defence mechanism of compensation²⁶¹ against the effective absence of a viable meditative tradition, especially in the larger or urban monasteries. However, if this is a conscious endeavour, then, it is simply an effort in gaining *social status and honour*, which are useful in attracting a loyal audience and wealthy supporters.

Ironically, while more Asian monastics and ethnic Buddhists today place more emphasis on rituals, more western and westernized Buddhists (monastic and lay) tend to be more enthusiastic about meditation and sutta learning. This is probably a vital phase that Asian Buddhists must pass through as they struggle with a new urbanized economic order in a more globalized society.

²⁵⁵ The title means "the heap of jewels." Jonathan Silk, "The origins and early history of the Mahāratnakūṭa tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism with a study of the Ratnarāsisūtra and related materials," PhD dissertation, Univ of Michigan, 1994.

²⁵⁶ The title means "the discourse on Rāṣṭrapāla's question."

²⁵⁷ See Paul Harrison, "Searching for the origins of Mahāyāna," *Eastern Buddhist*, ns 28,1 1995:65; Daniel Boucher 2008:40-63.

²⁵⁸ Unrai Wogihara, *Abhisamayālamkāra'āloka Prajñā[āramitāvyaḥkyā*, Tokyo, 1932:771-784; tr E Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 lines and its Verse Summary*, Bolinas, 1973:230-235.

²⁵⁹ A 10.99/5:201-209 @ SD 30.9. Cf **Poṭṭhila-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 20.7), where a Tipiṭaka expert monk is made to spend time as a forest monk (DhA 20.7/3:417-421), SD 34.4.

²⁶⁰ **Cakkhu,pāla-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 1.1/1 : 7 f); **Dve Sahāyaka Bhikkhu Vatthu** (DhA 1.14/1:154); **Saṅkicca Sāmaṇera Vatthu** (DhA 8.9/2:240); **Kapila Maccha Vatthu** (DhA 24.1/4:37 f).

²⁶¹ On defence mechanism, or more fully, unconscious defence mechanism, see **Samāṇa Gadrabha S** (A 3.81) @ SD 24.10b(2).

7.3.4.4 WHERE TO LOOK. As Mahāyāna Buddhism grew, it tended to rise in or near urbanized areas, where the contemplative tradition was either displaced by systems that were more ritualistic and pietist (such as the Pure Land schools); or more philosophical (such as the Yogacara or the Tiantai school); or, the meditation system tended to become more formalized and teacher-centred (as in the case of Chan and Zen).

The taste and spirit of early Buddhist meditation—the understanding and experience of mental training as found in early Buddhism—were in due course essentially lost in such sectarianism and innovativeness—that is, until recent times, when Mahāyāna practitioners, mostly on an individual basis, but widespread enough, often resort to early Buddhist teachings and method of meditation.²⁶² This, of course, referred mostly to the monastic or elite level of Buddhism.

At the grassroots, popular Buddhism is much more complicated, with the individual's Buddhism defined more by his inclinations and exigencies than by sacred texts and noble truths. Very often, such a person's view of Buddhism is significantly skewed by other religions that socially predominate, especially Christianity, so that his heart is moved by external rather than spiritual solutions and succour that Buddhism provides.

The Mahāyāna spirit is still alive and thriving. With the availability of printing and publishing, the computer and the Internet, and of course the Buddhist texts (if we need them), and, most significantly, with some schooling, professionalism, affluence—and a drive for self-expression—we could well spread our own initiatives and ideas. And if we have surplus funds and time, we might even start our own groups and centres to propagate our Buddhist visions. These are the characteristics of *a living Buddhism*. Indeed, if such energy and genius are less individualistic, elitist, eccentric or introverted, but more disciplined, Dharma-inspired and Sangha-spirited, Buddhism can be a very significant social and spiritual force in our times.

7.3.4.5 RISING FROM THE MUD. The present realities (especially in Singapore, but reflective of similar places) are, however, are more painful. We can be so conditioned by what we want to believe of Buddhism that we simply fail to recognize the pervading pathology of it all—that despite our numbers, we are really not well at all, even dysfunctional, and that we can be very much better than what we are now as a Buddhist community. Surely, a pervasive co-dependence is at work here.

We are a fragmented nation of foreign Buddhist tribes and foreign agents, each with our own patriarch and matriarch—we might be a net of Indra's jewels, but very few of them are showing or reflecting any light. Our Buddhist mission centres are often *foreign* first, and Buddhism seems merely a bait to draw in the locals and an opiate to keep them in. We are admiringly drawn to Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand, undeniably rich in their own Buddhist cultures. But what is it that draws us to such external influences: our own lack of a local Buddhist culture. We are in love with museums and exhibits, but forget the living in our own community. We are glassy-eyed tourists never really a part of what we adore, so we keep returning for more. We graze in alien green pastures, while our own herd remains untended at home.²⁶³ Ironically, many from these ethnic Buddhist cultures are also drawn to our own country, more often for her affluence than for our spiritual liberation. We have to work this out for ourselves.

As a very young nation (founded in 1819), Singapore has still to see Buddhism take root here, as it has taken root in other southeast Asian countries, or in Australia, or the West. Our love for Buddhism, and perhaps our past lives and affinities as monastic hands in foreign Buddhist lands, meantime draw us magically and inexorably, as it were, to the scholarly Sinhala hamudruvo, the magical Thai luangphor, the scholastic Burmese sayadaw, the charismatic Tibetan gelong, the exotic Japanese sensei, the lofty angmoh²⁶⁴ venerable,²⁶⁵ and the occult Taiwan shifu. Such geniality towards foreign talents has happily

²⁶² Robert Buswell, Jr, wrting from his experience as a Korean Seon monk, says that “Most [Seon monks] begin their meditation training only *after* they were steeped in the basic teachings of Buddhism ... ” and that writings on early Buddhism is popular with them (*The Zen Monastic Experience*, Princeton Univ Press, 1992:217).

²⁶³ Cf Dh 19.

²⁶⁴ Angmoh “red-haired,” local Hokkien and Singlish (also Malaysian Hokkien slang) slang for a white person.

boosted a regular and lucrative religious tourism to these foreign lands, and also as further acculturation. We are born into a free nation, but we, as Buddhists, are still colonies and slaves under legion foreign masters.

Buddhist social atomism (and we might even say, anomie) in Singapore is at its most diverse level here, mainly due to the divisive influence and effects of **ethnic Buddhism**s in Singapore.²⁶⁶ Hopefully, this Buddhist cell-division will mature into a cell-growth and organic integration, so that we have healthy local responses to the Buddha Dharma, such as those in Malaysia,²⁶⁷ Australia and the west. We can and must learn from such communities, where they are wholesomely successful, how to organize ourselves socially, intellectually and professionally in a Dharma-based manner. We need to tend to our own Bodhi tree growing in our own garden to shelter us.²⁶⁸

7.3.4.6 LOCALIZE, THEN GLOBALIZE. In short, we need to *globalize*, which means to be a part of an international network of Buddhist groups and individuals as an effective and significant platform, presence and outreach. As a global platform, we should be able to discuss and share learning, ideas and resources, for the sake of local Buddhist growth. Global Buddhism works as a team to make Buddhism available locally in a culture-friendly manner, so that we feel we are part of a bigger spiritual family. As a global community (including foreign centres and missions), we share a unified vision and mission to reach out to other areas untouched by the Dharma.

However, before we can *globalize*, we must first *localize*. We need to pool and activate our local talents and workers to serve as anchors and nodes of a greater global Buddhism. We need to look beyond foreign missions and exotic sects, into the heart of the Dharma. We must look at ourselves, for all the potential we have to put together the best we have to build a buddha-land here and now.

This is the true Mahāyāna spirit that would well pave or open up the highway to the ancient city, but it is a journey that we must begin as soon as possible. For the moment, we need a torch, if only we can find one, to find our way around, and a fire, only if we can start one, to warm ourselves with. Perhaps, the lotuses are already blossoming, their hearts rich with seeds, just waiting for the sun-rise.

8 The Buddha and Prometheus

8.1 PROMETHEUS. In terms of comparative mythology—comparing early Buddhism with Greek mythology—the Buddha, who brings liberating knowledge to the world, is a Prometheus figure, man-

²⁶⁵ Such native patronage, however, is often exploited, even disrespected. **Complaints** received from concerned locals who patronize foreign missions incl: (1) Thai temples do not allow the singing of local Buddhist songs and hymns; (2) Sinhala temples do not allow an other kinds of chanting styles, such as plainchant; (3) Burmese-inspired publications tend to have poor editorial and critical standards, and are treated like objects of merit, rather than learning tools; (4) Japanese groups tend to isolate themselves from non-Japanese centres (one lay group even disallow their youths from joining the courses of other Buddhist groups); (5) Tibetan group followers tend to have a triumphalist view that their Buddhism is the “most powerful,” even the only “true and great” vehicle; (6) the ultimate motive of most foreign teachers seems to be that of fund-raising, and they tend to form local networks of rich admirers as a fund-pool, even though some of them come from the first world. These are just the fine tips of the enormous foreign icebergs at a glance.

²⁶⁶ Another very seriously deleterious impediment to Buddhist growth in Singapore is the dominance of money-theist temple organizations and leadership. Some of its implications have been discussed in **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17.

²⁶⁷ In Malaysian Buddhism, it can said that the death of K Sri Dhammamanda (2006), the charismatic “chief high priest” of the Syam Nikaya “Mahavihara” temple in KL marks a transition from a heavily unilateral foreign-mission-orientation to one that reflects more of local talents and local culture that fits well into a globalized Buddhist community. The Mahavihara continues to remain so, with Dhammananda’s nephew installed, in good Syam Nikaya tradition, as the new chief high priest. **Jeffrey Samuels** of West Kentucky Univ, USA, is currently working on a social history of Theravada in Malaysia.

²⁶⁸ For an insight into the issues related to ethnic Buddhism, see eg Religion & Ethics Newsweekly 2001 & Numrich 2003.

kind's fire-bringer (*pabhañ,kara*), light-bearer (*jutin,dhara*) and light-giver (*dīpañkara*).²⁶⁹ According to Greek mythology, Prometheus (meaning “forethought”) is a Titan.²⁷⁰ Known for his wily intelligence, he is mankind's champion, who steals fire from Zeus and gives it to mortals; or, according to some sources, mankind already had fire, but Zeus takes it away from them. Prometheus is also said to have taught mankind numerous crafts.²⁷¹

Zeus then punishes him for his fervent protection and patronage of mankind by having him chained to a rock in the Caucasus, while a great eagle tears out and devours his liver. Since Prometheus is a Titan, his liver regenerates, but the eagle comes again the next morning to devour it again, day after day. Prometheus is finally rescued by Heracles, who kills the eagle and unchains him.

Almighty Zeus, in revenge, creates the first woman, the beautiful Pandora (“all-giving”), and gives her a special box. On earth, Epimetheus (“afterthought”), Prometheus's slow-witted brother makes her his wife, forgetting his brother's warning not to accept any gift from the gods. When the box is opened, every human misery escapes and infests the world, only Hope remaining behind.

Zeus, the high god, is determined to keep mankind in the darkness and deprivation of their ignorance, so that the world remains subservient, so that “as flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods.”²⁷² Zeus thus plays the role of Māra in early Buddhism, by keeping us from awakening so that we remain subject to his world. Or, like crafty priests, feeding us just enough religion to keep us coming back for more, but never allowing us to seek and see the truth for ourselves, and so be free.

8.2 EPIMETHEUS. Actually, it is Epimetheus, Prometheus' foolish brother, who fits the role of Māra better. For, the Buddhist Māra is neither as maleficent nor as powerful as Zeus. Even though Māra wields almighty power over the sense-world, he never succeeds in preventing the Buddha in his efforts.²⁷³ Like Epimetheus, Māra lacks wisdom and compassion, and as such is only led by his own ignorance and instincts.

Yet, Māra is a high god himself, said to inhabit the Para,nimmitta Vasavatti world: he is even higher than the “Creator Gods,” Nimmāṇa,ratī, “who delight in creating.” So great is Māra's power that he has the fiat to order even these powerful gods to do the creating for him! But for such a powerful high god to lack wisdom can be devastating for the world. Like a narcissistic adolescent, he desires everything for himself, to have the entire world under his sway.

The Buddha is beyond Māra's reach because he (the Buddha) has *transcended thought*: he is “Meta-metheus,” as it were. He is controlled neither by forethought nor by afterthought. Even as a god, Prometheus is not really free, but has to work his wiles to outwit Zeus. The Buddha, on the other hand, is beyond the power of any god or God. Moreover, he is teacher to both the gods and humans (*satthā deva,-manussānam*).

8.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE MYTHS. Buddhist training begins with the disciplining of our body and speech as the bases for mental development. In other words, we need to examine how our body-based lives often stun, even stunt, our mental lives. If we live simply dictated by what we see, what we smell, what we hear, what we taste, and what we touch, we remain as Māra's subjects. We become moths drawn

²⁶⁹ “Light-bringer” (*pabhañ,kara*), Ap 2:340, 470; Vv 25*; VvA 106. “Light bearer” (*jutin,dhara*), S 1:121,17*; J 2:353.8*; Ap 551,17; B 20.10; C 3.6.3. “Light-giver” (*dīpañkara*), Sn 1136; Dh 236; Nc:Be 212,28 (Ee 195,22); Vism 203. Amongst numerous other light metaphors, we have “the one emitting rays (like the sun)” (*aṅgī,rasa* or *aṅgī,rasa*) (V 1:25,32*; D 3:196,7*; S 1:196,3* = Tha 1252; S 1:81,15* = A 3:239,25*; Tha 536), and in Mahāyāna, “the one of boundless light” (*amitābha*). All these epithets are often applied to buddhas. See **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30) @ SD 36.9 (4.5): The Buddha's radiance.

²⁷⁰ The Titans, six male and six female, are the “old” god, the offspring of Gaia (Earth) and Uranus (Heaven), ie before the rise of the “new” gods led by Zeus. Cf the rise of Sakra and the 33 gods (*tāvātimsa*) by expelling the old gods from that heaven (J 1:202; DhA 1:272-280; cf SnA 484 f).

²⁷¹ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prometheus>; also Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman Mythology, edd Luke & Monica Roman, Facts-On-File, 2010: Prometheus, Prometheus Bound.

²⁷² Shakespeare, *King Lear* 4.1.

²⁷³ See **Māra**, SD 61.8. **Brahma Nimantanika S** (M 49) depicts Māra as having to power even over Mahā Brah-mā and his host in their own heaven. The Buddha however sees him out. (M 49/1:326-331), SD 11.7.

to the naked flames of greed, hate and delusion. Like Prometheus, we suffer because of our self-made fires, devouring us over and again, until we break free from our chains.

Prometheus is eventually released from his chains, free from the eagle's daily tearing out his liver, to become whole again. Our night of spiritual dismemberment begins to end when we learn to free ourselves from being dominated by our physical faculties. We are *re-membered*, as it were—we truly become a unified being, a true individual—by rising above our physical sensibilities to more profound joy and peace.

When we have fully freed ourselves from our physical selves, we are able to open the door of our breath and enter our inner space as mental beings of supreme bliss. Even if we are unable to enter that breath-door, just standing there and looking into it, can profoundly and lastingly energize us so that we would return to the sense-world as masters of our faculties. In short, we are a beautiful mind in a beautiful body. More importantly, as masters of our minds and thoughts, we are forever beyond the power of any god, God, devil, or Māra. For we are buddhas.

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